Bowie State University W.E.B. Du Bois Center 2025

FREEDOM

A Journal of Research in Africana Studies | Vol. 2

General Information

Freedom: A Journal of Research in Africana Studies (ISBN: 13 979-8-218-29958-3) is a digital peer review journal published annually in June. Address inquiries to: BSU Du Bois Center, *Freedom: A Journal of Research in Africana Studies*, MLKC 2380, Department of History and Government, 14000 Jericho Park Road, Bowie State University, Bowie, MD 20715.

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FREEDOM:
A JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN AFRICANA STUDIES

A BOWIE STATE UNIVERSITY DU BOIS CENTER REVIEW OF ISSUES IN AFRICANA STUDIES

VOL. 2 SUMMER 2025 NUMBER 2

Freedom is published under the auspices of a grant from the Mellon Foundation, the BSU Du Bois Center for the Study of the Black Experience (CSBE) and the Department of History and Government, with the assistance of an editorial/advisory board.

The purpose of *Freedom* is threefold: first, to emphasize the relevance of Africana Studies to contemporary life, focusing particularly on the experiences of communities of African descent in the Americas; second, to facilitate the dissemination of scholarship on Africana Studies; and third, to foster international perspectives in an era of increasing globalization and intercultural contacts. This issue addresses the question: how have Black people approached and engaged with liberational theory and praxis to secure self-determination both historically and contemporarily? This journal specializes in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research focusing on the lived experiences of the Black Diaspora

Published under the auspices of the Bowie State University W.E.B. Du Bois Center for the Study of the Black Experience and the Department of History and Government, Bowie State University, Bowie, Maryland 20715.

ISSN Online : 2998-8330
ISSN Print: 2998-8322

Painting: "Family Prayer"

J. Everett Young is an animator, background designer, and character concept artist who acquired his Bachelor of Science in animation and motion graphics from Bowie State University. He also received a certificate in 3D animation from the Boston University Center for Digital Imaging Arts (CDIA). Everett is currently a lead concept and character designer for Outlook/OVFX Animation Studio in Baltimore Maryland.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Painting: "Sunday Mornings at Sugarland"

Samuel Sharpe is a recent graduate of Bowie State University, where he earned a degree in Visual Communication and Digital Media Arts (VCDMA) with a concentration in Advertising and Design. He began painting shortly after high school and has since dedicated himself to honing his craft. Samuel's mission is to inspire and uplift others through his art.

Statement from the Editor

From Dr. Sheneese Thompson, Editor
Freedom: A Journal of Research in Africana Studies

> In 1918, in order to win the war, we had to make Germans into Huns. In order to win, the South had to make Negroes into thieves, monsters, and idiots. Tomorrow, we must make Latins, Southeastern Europeans, Turks, and other Asiatics into actual "lesser breeds without the law." Some seem to see today anti-Christ in Catholicism; and in Jews, international plotters of the Protocol; and in "the rising tide of color," a threat to all civilization and human culture. Even if these things were true, it would be difficult to bring the truth clearly before the ignorant mob and guide it toward the overthrow of evil. But if these be half true or wholly false, the mob can only be stirred to action by wholesale lying, and this is difficult and costly, and may be successfully answered; or by secret underground whispering, the methods of night and mask, the psychology of vague and unknown ill, the innuendo that cannot be answered, for it is not openly published.
>
> —W.E.B. Du Bois, "Back Toward Slavery"
> in *Black Reconstruction; An Essay Toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (1935)

Ninety years ago, W.E.B. Du Bois took on the herculean task of documenting the details of Reconstruction and its collapse which revealed a concerted effort to undo any financial, legal, and social progress made by Black Americans in the period immediately following the Civil War. Du Bois's writing, timeless and prescient, highlights the importance of truth-telling as a critical tool for undermining dangerous propaganda that threatens to divide humanity in this cultural moment. In the wake of attacks on civil liberties, academic freedom, free speech, human rights, and the pervasive dissemination of misinformation and disinformation, Du Bois's words are yet again instructive, and here at *Freedom: A Journal of Research in Africana Studies,* we intend to continue to openly publish perspectives that inform and unify the global Black diaspora with the rest of the world.

The submissions in this volume are arranged thematically and address historical and contemporary perspectives on Black archival work, community-building, higher education, representation in popular media, queerness,

and African spiritualities. The volume opens with works of poetry, "For the Future Generations," by Edie Wallace, "Our Souls Look Back in Wonder," by Suzanne Johnson, and "Skin//Content: Or, Partitioning the Variance of Dreams," by R.J. Petteway, each of which collapse time and space to speak to the joy, pain, hope, and complexity of Black pasts, presents, and futures.

Phillip Luke Sintiere's, "Yolande Du Bois's Scrapbooks: Sketching an Archival History," explores the importance of alternative archival methodologies in (re)constructing Black women's histories. Sintiere establishes Yolande as a Du Bois all her own with a full life outside of the long shadow of her father. Exploring the provenance of the scrapbooks, as well as the importance of proper storage, Sintiere invites us into new ways to study the lives of Yolande and the Du Bois family.

J. Edward Hackett and Magana Kabugi both analyze Martin Luther King, Jr. vis-à-vis community. "The Possibility King's Beloved Community Going Forward" meditates on the philosophical underpinnings of King's concept of "beloved community," as well as approaches to applying that philosophy toward a future that centers love and humanity. "Cartooning the Beloved Community: Martin Luther King Jr. and Political Personhood in 'The Montgomery Story'" considers how King, non-violent direct action, and his concept of community is represented in the comic book, *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story* (1957). Kabugi studies the importance of print media in political propaganda of the time and how *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story* was a concerted effort to counteract negative stereotypes about Black Americans.

"Twice as Hard: A Black Parable for Existing in Higher Education," by Frederick V. Engram, Jr. interrogates the promises and pitfalls of academic careers for Black professionals at predominantly white institutions. Engram challenges the notion that overworking guarantees job security and upward mobility and warns against the attending health concerns like physical and mental burnout. Engram constructs a qualitative study to explore the impact of these parables on people at various stages of the academic profession.

The last three articles address femininity, queerness, as well as their representations in music, television, film, and the world. Angela Nelson's, "The Symbolic Annihilation of Black Working-Class Women in The Black Family (aka Good Times)," addresses the complexity of representation in the beloved series, *Good Times.* Nelson highlights the tensions between constructing a

beloved Black matriarch and subverting the agency of women in the face of interpersonal and domestic violence present in the show. Conversely, Pilar Caceres Cartagena's, "Blackness, Femininity, and Queerness within Afro-Peruvian Female Hip Hop" explores how Black, queer, women hip hop artists in Peru use the artform to disrupt normative representations of race, gender, and sexuality and establish a counterculture in the face of national efforts to overdetermine Peruvian-ness in a way that excludes marginalized people and identities. Finally, Toluwani Roberts's, "Queer in an African Worldsense: The Spirituality of Sexuality in Nigeria and South Africa," examines Igbo and Zulu cultures and the history of same-sex marriage between women in those communities to write against narratives that suggest that same-sex relationships emerged in Africa as a consequence of colonization. Roberts's article offers readers much to consider in this cultural moment marked by a retrenchment of rights for all, and especially those who are LGBTQIA identified.

The volume concludes with reviews of Manisha Sinha's, *The Rise and Fall of the Second American Republic: Reconstruction, 1860-1920* (2024), Kwasi Konadu's, *Many Black Women of this Fortress: Graça, Mónica and Adwoa, Three Enslaved Women of Portugal's African Empire* (2022), and Omari Souza's, *Design Against Racism: Creating Work That Transforms Communities* (2025), all of which tie nicely into the established themes of the journal, and each add meaningful scholarship to the study of Black lives and histories.

With extreme gratitude to the contributors in this volume and the grand legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois, upon whose shoulders we stand, I implore readers to consider how ninety years later, we can use Du Bois's prescient words, as well as those of the contributing authors, as a blueprint to not fall prey to the propaganda that supposes our friends are our enemies and our enemies our are friends.

FREEDOM:
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VOLUME III
Call for Papers
Abstracts Due: October 3, 2025

Freedom: A Journal of Research in Africana Studies is a digital peer-reviewed periodical published annually by the W.E.B. Du Bois Center for the Study of the Black Experience (CSBE) at Bowie State University. This journal specializes in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research focusing on the lived experiences of the Black Diaspora.

Our editorial board invites you to submit 250 to 300-word abstracts for research articles, book reviews, poetry, and original multimedia-based submissions. Any performance-based submissions must not be publicly accessible or previously hosted on other platforms. Research articles should be limited to between 3,000 and 5,000 words; book reviews and short fiction should be limited to 1,500 words, and multimedia submissions should be no more than 10 minutes. All written submissions should follow the most recent Chicago Manual of Style. Submissions should be emailed as a word document or a link to the multimedia file to duboiscenter@bowiestate.edu. Please remove your name, institutional affiliation, and any other identifying information from your complete manuscript for review.

The deadline for abstract submissions is October 3, 2025. Authors will be notified that their abstract has been accepted by Nov 7, 2025. Complete manuscripts for accepted abstracts will be due January 23, 2026, and the issue will be published in July 2026. If you have questions about the journal or submitting to it, please email duboiscenter@bowiestate.edu attention Dr. Karen Cook-Bell, Managing Editor.

For the Future Generations

Edie Wallace
Friends of Tolson's Chapel

We survived
enslaved and free
the roots for life and growth

We gather
a community
in homes of friends and folk

We worship
singing hope and praise
the church bell rings our faith

We educate
to lift us higher
the walls with painted slate

We share
both aid and ease of mind
to those who need among us

We embrace
our gathered energy
a cloak of love and promise

These gifts of strength and buoyancy
live within our chapel walls
for the future generations
a lesson for us all

Our Souls Look Back in Wonder!

Suzanne Johnson
Sugarland Ethno History Project, Inc

How did we survive? How did we thrive?

Our souls look back in wonder!

We worked together, learned together, worshipped together and

cared for each other.

Our souls look back in wonder!

We became a true community, in beautiful Sugarland!

Our souls look back in wonder!

We taught our children, celebrated our lives, and saved our stories for others to hear.

Our souls look back in wonder!

We are people of the soil, working hard for our families.

We are people of song, as we praised the Lord.

We honored our ancestors with a place for peaceful rest.

Our souls look back in wonder!

SKIN//Content
OR, PARTITIONING THE VARIANCE OF DREAMS

R.J. Petteway, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Portland State University

Contested.
Pitied.
Envied.

Characters march like Calibri through white space
dragging the broken backs of margins twice lynched;

New blood upon hued lines, fractured:
a return.

Did you catch that? That's
a drop.

These shades are not silhouettes, shadows of shallow footprints
pressed upon the banks of the Columbia – fuck your fables.

If you see us singing, art upon bones in rhythm, blues of trials
and trails unfair; we've bled and dripped, wept and shed this art;

Contoured the topography of privilege, fertilized these
stolen lands; spilled, poured, and replenished – we are full.

Latticed resolve in the form of scars upon scars upon
our many shades the sun still rises sweat still beads

upon this collective callous we call *United*; the curves of our
warmed shoulders shaping horizons borne of movements:

arms unfolding
   elbows cracking
wrists turning
   hands burning
to preserve these embers.

And somehow
you managed to miss
it all.

Our fruit
                turned familiar
in your white daughters' mouths,
wondering

whose arms
tilled the soil

whose lips
slid
upon the truth

palms pressed
upon the engines
of conscience:

                do you wash them first?

Rinse away risks imprinted upon our brothers
imposed upon our sisters
whose children still dream
dreams of peeling away your fears
and the corneas that cover them,
planting them next to the Rio Grande.

But fear is no more fruit than it is seed
and skin is no more canvas than it is peel

So this art is not a cover
upon a white imaginary,
nor an ode to its contentment.

It is black.
It is brown.
It is caramel.
Character
embodied
to the marrow.

Surveilled.
Policed.
Painted.

Worn.
Danced.
Eaten.

You feast
upon
this skin

yet you'd starve

within it.

IDEAS//Forever

R.J. Petteway

summer stars
concealed by sparks
from a front room

tears singed
as wings of fireflies
push through

thick air of darkness –

who will light these humid nights
to starve these flames
forever

mend our burned palms
so we can grow
futures

from the fertile ash
left beneath
our nails?

SEASONED//Counters
OR, AN ODE TO GOOD TROUBLE

R.J. Petteway

Eggs cracked by hands blistered on batons
the night before, my Aunt T watched it on the TV –
indignation plated with craft, over easy
spread upon imaginations as if the mind
would not devour itself, falling

into cavities carved by convictions, decades
of doctrines dissolved and discovered each morning
when the lights come on, dripping

Black

coffee undoubtedly grown by hands of the same,
to be sweetened, sipped, enjoyed even –
basic taste buds revel in dark desires,

reveal:

y'all wouldn't sell shit without the fruits of labor
confined to the contours of those rusted shakers –

salt, pepper, sugar.

How sweet indeed, to believe yourselves;
countless counters holding up your postures,
our bloodied brows on swivel, unrested
backs upon stools – weapons of the weary
spinning circles beneath your gaze,

realization:

whiteness cannot exist

without yolks.

Bring my toast.

Yolande Du Bois's Scrapbooks: Sketching an Archival History

By Phillip Luke Sinitiere, Ph.D.
Senior Research Fellow
W.E.B. Du Bois Center, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

In April 2023, the special collections department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst acquired eight of Yolande Du Bois's scrapbooks (1900-1961). The scrapbooks document her life and that of her family between 1915 until 1929, showing her time as a teenager and high school student to that of a middle-aged Black professional woman. Across roughly six hundred pages, she includes never before seen photos of her father, W.E.B. Du Bois and her mother, Nina Gomer Du Bois. She curates carefully arranged artifacts from her years as a student at Fisk University between 1921 and 1924. She includes her writings and some of her artwork published in the 1920s in *The Crisis* and its children's magazine, *The Brownies' Book*, plus several unpublished poems and reflections about her high school teaching career in Baltimore. Additionally, Yolande Du Bois documents her two years at Columbia University, where she completed an MA in 1926. Two scrapbooks present her work in 1924-1925 as a summer counselor at Fern Rock, a New York City-area YWCA camp along with a trip to France, Switzerland, and England in the summer of 1927. The final scrapbook records her short-lived marriage to—and European honeymoon with—the queer Harlem Renaissance writer, Countee Cullen. This essay offers a research summary report on the scrapbooks, a sketch of their archival history, and provenance. It explains how the content of the scrapbooks complements and expands existing Du Bois scholarship because they uniquely present Yolande Du Bois in her own words through her own perspective as a student and writer. Through her creative endeavors the scrapbooks reveal an aesthetic autobiography of an unsung Harlem Renaissance visual and literary artist.

KEYWORDS: Yolande Du Bois, W.E.B. Du Bois, Archives, Scrapbooks, Harlem Renaissance

INTRODUCTION

In April 2023, the special collections department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass) acquired eight of Yolande Du Bois's scrapbooks (1900-1961). The scrapbooks document Yolande's life and that of her family between 1915 until 1929, showing her time as a teenager and high school student to that of a middle-aged Black professional woman. Across roughly six hundred pages, she includes never before seen photos of her father, W.E.B. Du Bois and her mother, Nina Gomer Du Bois on family vacations in recreational settings.[1] She curated carefully arranged artifacts from her years as a student at Fisk University between 1921-1924. She included her writings and some of her artwork published in the 1920s in *The Crisis*, as well as its children's magazine, *The Brownies' Book*, plus several unpublished poems and reflections about her high school teaching career in Baltimore. Additionally, Yolande documented her two years at Columbia University, where she completed an MA in 1926. Two scrapbooks present her work in 1924-1925 as a summer counselor at Fern Rock, a New York City-area YWCA camp along with a trip to Europe in 1926-1927. The final scrapbook records her short-lived marriage to—and European honeymoon with—the queer Harlem Renaissance writer Countee Cullen.[2]

This essay, the first scholarly article ever published on Yolande Du Bois's scrapbooks, offers a research summary report on the scrapbooks, a sketch of their archival history, and provenance. It explains how the content of the scrapbooks complements and expands existing Du Bois scholarship because they uniquely present Yolande Du Bois in her own words through her own

For general discussion of this topic and commentary on previous versions of this article, I thank the anonymous reviewer, as well as Whitney Battle-Baptiste, Edward Carson, Adam Holmes, Freeden Blume Oeur, and Aaron Rubinstein. In addition, feedback from audiences at The Governor's Academy in Byfield, Massachusetts and at the University of Massachusetts Amherst shaped my thinking. Finally, a shout out to the W.E.B. Du Bois Center at UMass Amherst and the Randolph W. Bromery Endowment for unflaggingly supporting my work.

[1] For the sake of clarity and readability, in this article I occasionally opt to use the first names of Du Bois family members. Readers should note that W.E.B. Du Bois's daughter's birth name was Nina Yolande Du Bois, named after her mother Nina G. Du Bois. Yet, she chose to go by Yolande. Yolande Du Bois's daughter's birth name was Yolande Du Bois Williams, named after her mother. Yet, she chose to go by Du Bois. At the time of her birth, her mother was married to Arnett Williams, her second husband to whom she was married for a decade. After Countee Cullen and Arnett Williams, Yolande Du Bois did not marry again.

[2] On Yolande Du Bois's time at Fern Rock, see Freeden Blume Oeur and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, "Scrapbooking Summer Camp with Yolande Du Bois," *Black Perspectives*, March 3, 2025, https://www.aaihs.org/scrapbooking-summer-camp-with-yolande-du-bois/.

perspective. It argues that the pages of her scrapbooks act as metaphorical portals through which her hidden Black history comes to light. That new history reveals Yolande Du Bois's aesthetic autobiography—in other words, the creative endeavors of an unsung Harlem Renaissance visual and literary artist.

RECOVERED FROM HISTORY

On January 17, 2023, a white investor and small business owner, Brody Drake, from Portland, Texas—a small town adjacent to Corpus Christi—offered the winning bid at auction for an abandoned storage unit, contents unknown. After opening the door, Drake discovered that the local Corpus Christi chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had once used the space for storage. The unit consisted of three large boxes of wooden Indigenous ceremonial African masks and nearly a dozen bankers boxes which contained NAACP chapter files, records, paperwork, and eight Yolande Du Bois scrapbooks.[3]

Drake sifted through the materials. He slowly turned the pages of eight scrapbooks, observing the images, inscriptions, and photographs. Sensing their significance, he searched Du Bois family names online and learned of the family's prominence. He posted a few photos of their covers and pages to Reddit to crowdsource additional information. Several readers posted a few helpful leads and proposed that Drake place the materials at a university or a museum. One comment blasted Drake as a greedy collector trafficking family artifacts to make money. Although he eventually deleted the Reddit post and associated images due to the antagonism, the conversation thread remains online.[4] He later connected with Japhet Aryiku, the Ghanaian-born, New York-based head of the W.E.B. Du Bois Museum Foundation, as well as W.E.B. Du Bois's two great-grandsons, Arthur McFarlane II and Jeffrey Du Bois Peck. Later, he received several offers to purchase the scrapbooks. He also read online that Fisk University and UMass held substantial portions of Du Bois archival materials. Eventually, Drake selected UMass based on

[3] Author interview with Brody Drake, August 4, 2024.

[4] r/MuseumPros, "Nina Yolande Dubois' personal scrapbooks from 1918-1928. *Daughter of W.E.B. Dubois," Sunday, March 19, 2023, https://www.reddit.com/r/MuseumPros/comments/11vggax/nina_yolande_dubois_personal_scrapbooks_from_1918/.

"how much they already had" to aid the work of scholars. "In my heart I felt really good about picking UMass."[5]

After negotiations concluded in early 2023, by April 8, Yolande Du Bois's scrapbooks arrived at UMass's Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Research Center on the twenty-fifth floor of the W.E.B. Du Bois Library. Upon being processed, the materials opened to scholars for research in the summer of 2023 as the Yolande Du Bois Scrapbook Collection. I was among the first scholars to conduct research in the scrapbooks.

AN INVENTORIAL HISTORY OF YOLANDE DU BOIS'S SCRAPBOOKS

Excitement and intrigue flooded my mind and body as I began opening the boxes that held the scrapbooks. I read through each scrapbook slowly in their original archival order, observing the images and reading the inscriptions. Because the scrapbooks were not in specific chronological order, it was as if I traveled with Yolande Du Bois back and forth through time. For example, I observed her transatlantic travels to Europe in the summer of 1927, where she visited places like England, France, and Switzerland with her best friend, Margaret Welmon, with whom she grew up in New York and with whom she attended Fisk University. Photos of them posing next to an airplane revealed that they traveled by air in Europe.[6]

Another scrapbook featured photos of a teenaged Yolande Du Bois vacationing in New Jersey with her mother and father. They are smiling on the beach in relaxed poses and enjoying leisurely summer moments. Other highlights included a photo of two Du Bois family friends standing with a collie dog named Steve. There are also multiple photos of a smaller spaniel dog she clearly adored, including one of her mother's, Nina Du Bois, playing fetch

[5] Author interview with Brody Drake, August 4, 2024.
[6] Yolande Du Bois, Large Scrapbook (Volume I), Box 1:4, Large Scrapbook (Volume II), Box 1:5, Yolande Du Bois Scrapbooks Collection, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

with the animal. Yolande Du Bois recorded the dog's name as Jack, thus documenting for posterity information about her beloved pet.[7]

To offer one final example in this unfolding inventorial history: a scrapbook with a red cover featured a hand drawn all caps monogram of NYD (for "Nina Yolande Du Bois") with a sketch of a ship sailing across the open ocean. This scrapbook contained photos of Yolande Du Bois and Countee Cullen at Henry O. Tanner's home in France, revealing that the newlyweds visited the Black artist during their honeymoon in Europe. Yolande Du Bois had thus prepared this scrapbook to document the earliest weeks of her marriage to Cullen. Unlike the other seven scrapbooks, the red scrapbook contained multiple blank pages, a symbolic artifact of her short-lived marriage.[8]

My first tour through Yolande Du Bois's scrapbooks presented literal and figurative snapshots of her coming of age. Numerous questions flooded my mind as I beheld images I had never seen before. What piqued her interest in creating scrapbooks in the first place? Why had I never seen any references to them before in the numerous Du Bois-specific and Du Bois-related archival collections I had visited over the course of fifteen years? How did the scrapbooks end up in a storage shed in South Texas when Yolande spent her life

[7] Yolande Du Bois, Photo Album, Box 1:1, Yolande Du Bois Scrapbooks Collection, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst. While there is only one photo of Steve, this canine captured the Du Bois family's attention and affection. It once belonged to a Russian immigrant family in New York City but later came under the Du Bois family's care. With her father's help, Yolande Du Bois registered Steve with the local humane society. Steve also traveled with the family on vacations. When Steve died, Du Bois eulogized the family pet in *The Crisis* and Yolande penned a poem in loving memory of her dog. On Steve's previous owners, see W.E.B. Du Bois, "Russia and America: An Interpretation, 1950, 11, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b221-i082. On Steve's registration, see W.E.B. Du Bois to Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, June 20, 1917, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b010-i292. On Steve's presence during Du Bois family vacations, see Nina Du Bois to W.E.B. Du Bois, 1917, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b160-i212; Nina Du Bois to W.E.B. Du Bois, 1917, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b160-i210. On Steve's death and tributes to his memory, see Nina Du Bois to W.E.B. Du Bois, 1917, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b160-i213; W.E.B. Du Bois, "Steve," *The Crisis*, December 1918, 62-63; Yolande Du Bois, "Steve," https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b239-i072, all in W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

[8] Yolande Du Bois, Large Scrapbook, Box 1:6, Yolande Du Bois Scrapbooks Collection, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

mostly in New York City, Atlanta, and Baltimore? Did she keep scrapbooks as an older adult? If so, where are those materials?

As these questions materialized, I realized that I was encountering another Yolande Du Bois. Before, I had either known her as a minor troublesome and an often difficult character in biographies of W.E.B. Du Bois or as the former spouse of a queer Harlem Renaissance artist whose massive, expensive wedding ceremony was the Harlem cultural event in April 1928.[9] I knew her, to use historian David Levering Lewis's descriptions that mirrored her father's attitudes, as "spunky, chubby, large-boned Yolande,"[10] as an erratic student with "roller-coaster performance"[11] in high school and as a "self-indulgent, under-achieving, uncertain, chronologically overweight, and often ill"[12] person. In other words, I had only known Yolande as a person upon whom history had acted.

These scrapbooks revealed the opposite: a dog mom, a smiling teenager, an active college student who dated athletes and musicians, and who danced and performed in theatre. They unveiled a young woman whose energetic social life included attending Fisk sporting events, musical performances, and sorority and fraternity gatherings. The scrapbooks show that Yolande Du Bois made her own history by documenting her own life in her own way and in her own voice, narrating her story visually and artifactually according to her own wishes and desires. These creative and curatorial practices moved her "from underneath the shadow of Du Bois" to use historian Tara T. Green's words, where she forged her identity as a Black woman beyond the cultural containments and historical weight of merely being Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois's daughter.[13]

To seek answers to my initial questions, I arranged the scrapbooks in chronological order and re-read them from cover to cover. Slowly. Purposefully. And lingering with photographs and inscriptions as I contemplated the larger historical context as Yolande Du Bois's life and times unfolded before me

[9] Charles Molesworth, *And Bid Him Sing: A Biography of Countee Cullen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 132-44.
[10] David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 345.
[11] Ibid., 464.
[12] David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 30.
[13] Tara T. Green, *See Me Naked: Black Women Defining Pleasure in the Interwar Era* (Newark: Rutgers University Press, 2022), 28.

chronologically. As I paced my way through the scrapbooks a second time, I paused to take notes, look up a name in Credo where the digitized version of the W.E.B. Du Bois Papers live, scour my research diary and digital scans from the Du Bois Collection at Fisk, or open my Kindle to word search in David Levering Lewis's Du Bois biographies. I also researched in other Du Bois-adjacent holdings at UMass, like the Du Bois Family Papers, to explore potential connections between artifacts and photographs across different archival collections. UMass acquired this collection in 2021 from Du Bois's great-grandson, Arthur McFarlane II.[14] Arthur's mother, Du Bois Williams (1932-2021), was Yolande's daughter and W.E.B. Du Bois's and Nina Du Bois's granddaughter. Among distinctive documentation about Du Bois Williams's life and career as a psychologist and professor in South Texas, and later in New Orleans, Du Bois family photographs reside in the Du Bois Family Papers, including images of Yolande Du Bois as a child, high school, and college student, and in her classroom as a teacher. Thus, as I detail below and as the footnotes in this article demonstrate, utilizing the digital primary resources in Credo, tapping certain secondary source biographies, and referencing my previous research findings in other collections, the contents of the Du Bois Family Papers informed my understanding of the scrapbooks' rich history. A clearer picture was emerging of the Yolande Du Bois Scrapbook Collection's provenance. Historical, contextual clues were starting to bring clarity to some of the scrapbooks' content. It is to these subjects I now turn.

YOLANDE DU BOIS'S SCRAPBOOK ARTISTRY

While space limitations prevent fuller coverage of the scrapbooks, the balance of this article will address their provenance and highlight several ways that enrich understanding of Yolande Du Bois as a person, as a student, and as a visual and literary artist. I will then explain how these new intellectual revelations point to potential future research paths.

In one sense, Yolande Du Bois's scrapbooking was an ordinary Black cultural practice in modern times. Yet it was also a distinct form of archiving and individual curation with unique personal, political, or existential purpose. Still in another sense, scrapbooking was a family affair. Her father assembled a scrapbook in 1915 that documented his pageant, *The Star of Ethiopia*, and kept

[14] Adam Holmes, "New Du Bois Materials Arrive at UMass Libraries," University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries News and Events, November 30, 2022, https://www.library.umass.edu/news/new-du-bois/.

a *Black Reconstruction in America* scrapbook in 1935 that cataloged in chronological order reviews of his groundbreaking book.[15] While Yolande Du Bois likely didn't first learn about scrapbooking from her father, she did follow his lead in this form of memory-making and far exceeded his memory book efforts in volume and content.

Nineteenth and early twentieth-century figures such as Joseph W.H. Cathcart, William Dorsey, Frederick Douglass, T. Thomas Fortune, Jack Johnson, L.S. Alexander Gumby, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Pauline Hopkins, and Mary Church Terrell kept scrapbooks about their lives and personal interests, which in turn meant that their artifactual assemblage documented the history that enveloped the times in which they lived. African American scrapbooks served a cultural function by preserving things like family history and various keepsakes like telegrams, flowers, and napkins that held personal significance. Their purposeful preservation and placement on the page present an alluring "autodocumentary" of Black history, to cite historian Laura Helton's concept.[16] Relatedly, rhetoric scholar Catherine Hayter's analysis of scrapbooks made by Black women like Tuskegee librarian Jessie P. Guzman (1898-1996) show what she terms a "feminist inventiveness." This innovative practice, she argues, reveals that a scrapbook maker's creative expression of individual agency and "rhetorical artifacts" on the page exemplifies an attempt to alter power relations in society.[17] Crafted by people from society's oppressed margins, scrapbooks also at times produced political counternarratives, what writer Ellen Gruber Garvey calls "alternative histories" to mainstream, racist perspectives about people of African descent.[18] Yolande Du Bois's scrapbook artistry reflected such motivations, purposes, and practices.

[15] W.E.B. Du Bois, Star of Ethiopia Scrapbook, 1915, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b233-i047, W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction* Scrapbook, Box 238, Folder 7, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

[16] Laura E. Helton, *Scattered and Fugitive Things: How Black Collectors Created Archives and Remade History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024), 56-80; Kristin Gilger, "Otherwise Lost or Forgotten: Collecting Black History in L.S. Alexander Gumby's 'Negroana' Scrapbooks," *African American Review* 48/1-2 (Spring/Summer 2015): 111-26.

[17] Catherine Hayter, "Cutting and Pasting: The Rhetorical Promise of Scrapbooking as Feminist Inventiveness and Agency from the Margins" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2021), 1-81.

[18] Ellen Gruber Garvey, *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 131-71, 212-14.

The dates that Yolande Du Bois inscribed throughout her scrapbooks indicate that their provenance began with her contemporaneous construction of them as she documented the unfolding events and happenings of her life from roughly 1915 until 1929. During those years she lived in various places across New York City, London, and Baltimore. Although it is not certain, it seems plausible that she traveled transatlantically in the late 1920s with at least some of her scrapbooks. She spent the summer of 1927 traveling across Europe, which she documented extensively in images across two scrapbooks. She resided on the continent during the summer and fall of 1928 for an extended honeymoon and period artistic study, an experience for which it seems she wished to make a personal, historical record.[19]

It is my contention that the scrapbooks remained in Yolande Du Bois's possession until her death in 1961. At that point, Dr. Du Bois exchanged letters with Yolande's daughter, Du Bois Williams, then living in New York City, advising her to hire an attorney to settle her mother's affairs, sell her mother's house in Baltimore, and arrange for the storage and safe-keeping of whatever house contents she wished to retain.[20] Although mention of the scrapbooks does not appear in the correspondence, it seems reasonable to speculate that Du Bois Williams came into possession of her mother's scrapbooks at this point and had them in her possession when she returned to her home in the Bronx.

Not long after Yolande Du Bois's death, Du Bois Williams moved to Denver, Colorado. The scrapbooks traveled with her to the Mountain West. There she raised a family and started working on a Ph.D. in psychology at the University of Colorado Boulder. In 1973, she moved to Corpus Christi, Texas. In South Texas she worked in the fields of community psychology, public health, and mental health, amidst serving with numerous charitable orga-

[19] For basic biographical details about Yolande Du Bois during this period in her life, see Lewis's two biographies. See also Yolande Du Bois, Large Scrapbook (Volume I), Box 1:4, Large Scrapbook (Volume II), Box 1:5, Large Scrapbook, Box 1:6, Yolande Du Bois Scrapbooks Collection, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

[20] W.E.B. Du Bois to Mrs. Du Bois McFarlane, March 21, 1961, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b153-i369; Du Bois Williams McFarlane to W.E.B. Du Bois, March 22, 1961, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b153-i371, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst. At the time of this exchange, Du Bois Williams was married to Arthur McFarlane, Arthur McFarlane II's father, hence the McFarlane surname used in the correspondence.

nizations. The scrapbooks again moved with her, this time from Denver to the Texas Gulf Coast. By 1979, she had completed all her graduate school requirements, including her dissertation, and became Dr. Du Bois Williams. From 1980 until 1988, Dr. Williams worked in private practice in Houston. In 1988 she became a psychology professor at Xavier University in New Orleans. After Hurricane Katrina displaced her in 2005, she retired to Fort Collins, Colorado where she remained until her death in November 2021.[21]

The timeline of Du Bois Williams's life rehearsed above sets into clearer relief the provenance of Yolande Du Bois's scrapbooks. It reveals the reasonable certainty that the scrapbooks made their way from Baltimore to the Bronx in 1961; then from the Bronx to Denver shortly thereafter; from Denver to Corpus Christi in 1973; and fifty years later from South Texas to Massachusetts. Although the specific details remain a mystery at the time of this writing, at some point after Du Bois Williams moved to Corpus Christi the local Corpus Christi NAACP chapter somehow came into possession of Yolande Du Bois's eight scrapbooks. They remained in South Texas, since there's no evidence to date that Du Bois Williams took them with her when she moved to Houston in 1980, New Orleans in 1988, or to Fort Collins in 2005. Then, at some point within the last half-century, these scrapbooks entered a storage unit in Portland, Texas. It is therefore reasonable to speculate that these scrapbooks may have resided in a South Texas storage unit hidden from history for roughly fifty years until Brody Drake's successful auction bid in 2023 unlocked the door.

Coupling the scrapbooks' precarious physical condition with the Texas Coastal Bend's meteorological and climate history, this half-century scenario is

[21] This short biographical summary draws on MaryNell Morgan, "The Souls of Women Folk in the Political Thought of W.E.B. Du Bois" (Ph.D. dissertation, Atlanta University, 1987), 155-71; Author interview with Du Bois Williams, August 9, 2019; Author interview with Arthur McFarlane II and Jeff Peck, August 10, 2019; Du Bois Williams, "Born Du Bois" research files, Jeffrey Du Bois Peck Personal Collection (private), Houston, Texas; Yolande Du Bois Williams, Personal History of Herself and W.E.B. Du Bois, Box 6, Folder 7, Du Bois Family Papers, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst; Du Bois Williams Interview Transcript and Video Files, Louis Massiah Papers, Scribe Video Center, Philadelphia; "Folks: W.E.B. Dubois (1989)," *AfroMarxist*, August 29, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rI8h5SuzGpo.

plausible.[22] Let me explain. During the last fifty years, roughly twenty-five tropical events have impacted the adjacent areas of Corpus Christi and Portland, half of which were hurricanes. Some of these events left the region flooded. Several of the scrapbooks have clear, visible water damage, especially the one about her freshman and sophomore years at Fisk in 1921-1923, as well as the scrapbook that documents her travel to England in 1926-1927.[23] Presumably, one or more of the aforementioned tropical events caused this damage. In addition, the Gulf Coast routinely experiences both high humidity and scorching temperatures throughout the spring and summer months. It is also not uncommon for the winter season in South Texas—Corpus Christi and Portland—to occasionally experience freezing temperatures. In addition to water damage from tropical storms and hurricanes, the natural seasonal changes meant that about every six months the scrapbooks were exposed to brutal cold (the record low was thirteen degrees in 1989), as well as excessive heat (the record high was 109 degrees in 2000). Throughout many of the scrapbooks, numerous photographs are faded and sometimes warped with overexposure; spines are cracked; interior pages, along with some of the leather covers, are dried out, brittle, frayed, or broken. A photobook, as well as a scrapbook she kept at Columbia University, show evidence of degraded conditions, reflecting severe temperature extremes and an identifiable absence of residing in a climate-controlled environment.[24]

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[22] Weather and climate history and data in this paragraph are from "Texas Coastal Bend," *Wikipedia.com*, "List of Texas hurricanes (1980-present)," *Wikipedia.com*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Texas_Coastal_Bend, last accessed January 14, 2025; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Texas_hurricanes_(1980%E2%80%93present), last accessed January 14, 2025; Roy Sylvan Dunn, "Hurricanes," February 1, 1995, *Handbook of Texas*, https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/hurricanes; David M. Roth, "Texas Hurricane History," United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Weather Service, January 17, 2010, https://www.weather.gov/media/lch/events/txhurricanehistory.pdf; "Major South Texas Storm Events," National Weather Service, n.d., https://www.weather.gov/crp/stormhistory, last accessed January 14, 2025; John Olivia, "Summer heat: record temps in Corpus Christi and how to battle warm weather," *Corpus Christi Caller Times*, July 8, 2023, https://www.caller.com/story/news/local/2023/07/08/health-risks-and-safety-tips-for-extreme-heat-this-summer/70394238007/; "Corpus Christi Weather Records," *ExtremeWeatherWatch.com*, https://www.extremeweatherwatch.com/cities/corpus-christi, last accessed January 14, 2025.

[23] Yolande Du Bois, Large Scrapbook (Volume I), Box 1:4, My Memory Book, 1922-1923, Box 1:8, Yolande Du Bois Scrapbooks Collection, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

[24] Yolande Du Bois, Photo Album, Box 1:1, Small Scrapbook, Box 1:3, Yolande Du Bois Scrapbooks Collection, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

It is worth pausing to note here that there's a fascinating parallel between the conditions of Yolande Du Bois's scrapbooks when they arrived at UMass in 2023 and the conditions of her father's papers and manuscripts when they arrived at UMass in 1973. The short story is this: about a decade before UMass's acquisition of Du Bois's archive, W.E.B. Du Bois and Shirley Graham Du Bois's moved from Brooklyn to Accra in October of 1961, with a substantial load of artifacts, manuscripts, and papers in tow. This represented about one-third of the total contents of Du Bois's manuscript collection. The second-third went to the Brooklyn home of historian and Communist intellectual, Herbert Aptheker, to whom Du Bois had granted the task of editing and publishing his papers.[25] Du Bois and Shirley Graham Du Bois deposited the final third of his archive in Fisk University's special collections, an acquisition librarian Arna Bontemps excitedly received and started processing.[26] In 1963, Du Bois passed away, leaving Graham Du Bois the inheritor of his massive archive. Three years later in 1966, a coup in Ghana deposed Kwame Nkrumah, which conditioned Graham Du Bois's swift exit from the country. Shortly thereafter, she moved to Cairo, Egypt, where she held Du Bois's personal papers. When Graham Du Bois sold the Du Bois Papers to UMass in 1973, a coordinated effort between the University Archives, UMass's W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies, UMass Press, and Chancellor Randolph Bromery brought the collection from Cairo to JFK airport, and then from JFK airport to Amherst. Upon the W.E.B. Du Bois Papers' arrival, archivists and conservationists determined that both the age and condition of most of the materials (some artifacts dated to the 1870s) would lead to terminal deterioration in only a handful of years. Thus, UMass's University Archives division contracted with New England conservationist George Cunha and his staff to chemically treat the Du Bois collection, ensuring their longevity and use. Seven years later, in 1980, the Du Bois Papers opened for scholarly research.[27]

[25] Phillip Luke Sinitiere, "'Dr. Du Bois gave me complete access to his Papers': Herbert Aptheker's Editorial History with W.E.B. Du Bois's Papers and Manuscripts," *Phylon* 60/1 (Summer 2023): 3-35.

[26] Phillip Luke Sinitiere, "'An Impressive Basis for Research:' Arna Bontemps' Co-Creation of the W.E.B. Du Bois Collection at Fisk University," *The Black Scholar* 52/2 (2022): 50-62.

[27] Phillip Luke Sinitiere, "The Paper Chase: How W.E.B. Du Bois's Archive Came to UMass," *Bookmark Magazine* (November 2020): 34-37; Phillip Luke Sinitiere, "W.E.B. Du Bois's Archives: An Intellectual and Cultural History," W.E.B. Du Bois Annual Lecture, University of Massachusetts Amherst, July 28, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MD3HLyzk2P8.

While W.E.B. Du Bois's papers were not hidden from history in the same way that Yolande Du Bois's scrapbooks were, their shared transport across numerous geographical locations and climate zones induced environmental stresses on their paper-based artifacts that left them in perilous physical condition. Yet, they survived. And traveled long distances into proper archival custody and care before scholars began their work of study, analysis, and interpretation.

The precarious physical condition of Yolande Du Bois's eight scrapbooks is common to this form of historical artifact. While it presents challenging questions about conservation—to which I previously alluded—and now in the twenty-first century about digitization, such close scrutiny of a scrapbook's content discloses captivating details about its creator's personality, their intellectual and cultural interests, and how they created meaning in life. Archivists Ann Frellsen, Kim Norman, and Brian Methot observe, "Each hand-written note, every carefully placed photograph or artifact, cards, clippings, and drawings were all chosen for a reason by the creator of the scrapbook. Something seemingly unimportant to some, such as a ticket stub or receipt, was a cherished memory to others."[28] This kind of attention to artifactual detail in Yolande Du Bois's scrapbooks reveals fascinating, groundbreaking history.

YOLANDE DU BOIS THE SILHOUETTIST

Of the remarkable history that Yolande Du Bois's scrapbooks contain, I highlight one example in significant detail: her visual artwork as a silhouettist in *The Crisis* magazine, the NAACP's monthly periodical that her father edited. In the scrapbook Yolande Du Bois kept while a graduate student at Columbia University, she placed a clipping of an article she wrote titled "Rain," affixing it to a blue sheet of construction paper. The essay is a short reflection about the natural landscape and weather patterns in Tennessee, presumably written as a literary memory of her time as a student at Fisk.[29] There were no bibliographic details she included about it, however due to

[28] Ann Frellsen, Kim Norman, and Brian Methot, "Scraps of Memories, Shards of Time: Preserving the African American Scrapbook Collection of Emory University Libraries, a *Save America's Treasures* grant project," *The Book and Paper Group Annual* 33 (2014): 26-34; Garvey, *Writing with Scissors*, 212-14, 225-27.

[29] Yolande Du Bois, Small Scrapbook, Box 1:3, Yolande Du Bois Scrapbooks Collection, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

my previous research on early twentieth-century Black print culture, I recognized it immediately as a *Crisis* article from the font style and the typeset book icons that adorned the magazine's pages during the 1920s. I also recognized the silhouette figure; I remembered that during the 1920s silhouettes occasionally appeared in *The Crisis* as interior illustrations that accompanied the magazine's text.

At the time, in the summer of 2023, I was unaware that Yolande Du Bois published essays in *The Crisis*, although I knew some of her work appeared in *The Brownies' Book*, a children's version of *The Crisis* published in 1920-21 and curated by Harlem Renaissance literary icon, Jessie Fauset.[30] Based on the late art historian Amy Helene Kirschke's work, I also knew that her illustrations had appeared on the April 1922 cover of *The Crisis*.[31] (As I explain further below, I would soon learn that her handiwork appeared on multiple *Crisis* covers in the mid-1920s.) Reading through issues of *The Crisis* from the 1920s looking for "Rain," I made a number of startling, truly revelatory discoveries.

In November 1924, *The Crisis* announced that Yolande Du Bois "who is studying for her Master of Arts degree in English at Columbia University" would become a magazine staff member "to help in news notes and decorations."[32] In early twentieth-century print culture parlance, decorations referred to artworks or illustrations. Yolande Du Bois would work as a consistent contributor until her matriculation at Columbia the following summer.[33] Thereafter, her work appeared in *The Crisis* more intermittently until 1932.

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[30] Green, *See Me Naked*, 35-37. On Fausett's editorial work, see Emily Wojcik, "Editing *Children of the Sun*: Jessie Redmon Fauset, Little Magazines, and the Cultivation of the New Negro," in *Communal Modernisms: Teaching Twentieth-Century Literature and Culture in the Twenty-First Century Classroom*, eds. Emily N. Hinnov, Laurel Harris, and Lauren M. Rosenblum (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 81-95; Jayne E. Marek, "Jessie Fauset and Her Readership: The Social Role of *The Brownies' Book*," in *Editing the Harlem Renaissance*, eds. Joshua M. Murray and Ross K. Tangedal (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press, 2021), 127-43; Freeden Blume Oeur, "The Children of the Sun: Celebrating the One Hundred-Year Anniversary of *The Brownies' Book*," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 14/3 (2021): 329-31.

[31] Amy Helene Kirschke, "Laura Wheeler Waring and the Women Illustrators of the Harlem Renaissance," in *Women Artists of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Amy Helene Kirschke (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 87, 100-01. On Black images more generally in *The Crisis* during Du Bois's editorial tenure, see Jenny Woodley, *Art for Equality: The NAACP's Cultural Campaign for Civil Rights* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 63-96.

[32] "The Horizon," *The Crisis*, November 1924, 29.

[33] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Negro Education, 1925," *The Crisis*, August 1925, 167.

Eventually, I located Yolande Du Bois's article, "Rain." It appeared in the January 1925 issue only two months after she joined *The Crisis*.[34] I then noticed that Yolande's clipping severed what else appeared on that same page: a hand drawn map of South Carolina for which she also penned a short, written description. From looking through her other scrapbooks, I instantly recognized her distinctive left-leaning capital letter handwriting (the rounded style of capital R's, for example) and the unique way she wrote the number nine with an elongated leg. As I thumbed through the January 1925 issue, I noticed other silhouettes.

Then came the revelation: While Yolande Du Bois's decorative contributions to *The Crisis* included geographical drawings, character illustrations, lettering, stenciling, and a host of other artistic forms, silhouettes became her signature artistic intervention, including some that appeared on *Crisis* covers in the mid-1920s.[35] To add quantitative specificity to this observation: between November 1924 and September 1928, eighteen of her silhouettes appeared in *The Crisis*. And between April 1922 and April 1925, different forms of Yolande Du Bois's artwork—primarily lettering and stenciling—appeared on *Crisis* covers while two covers combined stenciling and silhouettes.

Yolande Du Bois's name sometimes appeared in the Table of Contents as decorator or illustrator. Sometimes she signed her illustrations with NYD, and sometimes she did not. On other occasions, a number of her silhouettes and sketches escaped attribution, so she did not receive the credit she deserved. Until now. The pages of her scrapbooks, therefore, function as portals to hidden Black history. They unveiled clues that I have assembled to spotlight Yolande Du Bois's artistic creativity.

Any discussion of African American silhouettists recalls the work of contemporary artist Kara Walker (b. 1969). Active since the mid-1990s, Walker's silhouettes explore the contradictions and antinomies of antebellum history

[34] Yolande Du Bois, "Rain," *The Crisis*, January 1925, 134.

[35] While I don't address it in this article but instead in future research, in that same January 1925 issue, on pages 110 and 111, Yolande Du Bois illustrated Charles Chesnutt's serialized story "The Marked Tree." Since January featured part two of the article, this meant she illustrated part one of the story in the December 1924 issue. With all of this in mind, it is important to observe that the January 1925 issue featured a unique stylistic range of Yolande Du Bois's artistry in the form of illustrations, lettering, and geographical sketches. For more on these topics see Phillip Luke Sinitiere, "Yolande Du Bois's Scrapbooks: Portals to Hidden Black History," UMass Amherst Libraries, September 27, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9jXUUbjoaU.

while infusing the doubled visual meanings of her Black subjects with agency and intrigue alongside visually stereotyped "white" silhouetted characters. Often displayed on large walls across spatially expansive installations, Walker's silhouettes present what art history scholar, Darby English, terms "para-historical" visual narratives of Black-white interaction and interplay that both play on and critique racist conditions of the past while addressing racialized conditions of the present.[36] Art historian Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw describes Walker's use of silhouettes—a working class and reproducible craft easily disseminated—as the practice of "nostalgic postmodernism" that deploys "visual wit" to comment on the present through the use of an historic artform.[37]

Insofar as both women crafted silhouettes, it is easy to assume that the visibility of Walker's work today suggests that Yolande Du Bois's silhouettes may have constituted a kind of prehistory to her art. In reality, the truth is more nuanced. First, Yolande's silhouettes were always singular creations. Her silhouetted subjects existed alone and unto themselves on the pages of a monthly periodical, whereas Walker's silhouettes have lived in plurality and proximity as part of a visual narrative at the site of a particular installation. Second, the overwhelming majority of Yolande Du Bois's silhouettes were female; not so with Walker. Third, it is important to remember that silhouettes originated in US history during the late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth centuries. Their association with a simple shadow and scissor craft often overlooks the depth of their rich meaning and the potential they hold to represent visual forms of identity and agency. While African Americans were the subjects of silhouettes early in the artform's American history, they were also the creators of silhouettes themselves.[38] Following on the heels of their popular usage across the nineteenth century, the immediate historical context that shaped Yolande Du

[36] Darby English, "This Is Not About the Past: Silhouettes in the Work of Kara Walker," in *Kara Walker: Narratives of a Negress*, eds. Ian Berry, Darby English, Vivian Patterson, and Mark Reinhardt (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 142; Darby English, "A New Context for Reconstruction: Some Crises of Landscape in Kara Walker's Silhouette Installations," in *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 71-136.

[37] Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 5. See also, Robert Hobbs, *Kara Walker: White Shadows in Blackface* (New York: Karma Books, 2023).

[38] For this early history, I draw on Asma Naeem, ed., *Black Out: Silhouettes Then and Now* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018) and Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, "'Moses Williams, Cutter of Profiles': Silhouettes and African American Identity in the Early Republic," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149/1 (March 2005): 22-39.

Bois's silhouettes included the art education movement of the early twentieth century, and of course, the Harlem Renaissance.

While space precludes a fuller discussion of the early twentieth-century art education movement, the quick point to observe here is the influence of Polish-born lithographer Louis Prang. His Boston-based publishing company collaborated with art teachers to produce a series of classroom texts. These books guided students in technical instruction and endeavored to maximize free expression of a pupil's aesthetic invention and creativity. Prang's texts encouraged students to draw silhouettes and craft scrapbooks as forms of creative pursuit.[39] Given the ubiquity of his teaching manuals, it is likely that Prang's instructional guides figured into at least some of Yolande Du Bois's artistic education at the turn of the twentieth-century, especially since she considered using Prang publications when she became a classroom teacher in the late 1920s.[40]

Coming to prominence around 1925, the same period during which Yolande Du Bois worked for *The Crisis* and started decorating the magazine with her silhouettes, Aaron Douglas was the leading silhouettist of the Harlem Renaissance era. His distinctive modernist silhouettes, dubbed an "Afro-Deco" style, brought journal pages, book covers, and magazine covers to life, not to mention gracing murals with his artistic handiwork rich in symbolism. The figures intermingled with shaded background scenes of cities, skies, and mountains in a process that art historian Caroline Goeser terms "typification" where the visual messages about race could perform the "quick capture" of a viewer's attention as they observed Douglas's "bold, simplified forms predominately in silhouette."[41] Douglas was not the only New Negro-era art-

[39] Molly Donnermeyer, "Louis Prang: Lithographer and Art Education Advocate," Cincinnati Art Museum Blog, September 14, 2018, https://www.cincinnatiartmuseum.org/about/blog/library-blog-9142018/; Marybeth Kavanaugh, "Louis Prang, Father of the American Christmas Card," New York Historical Society, December 19, 2012, https://www.nyhistory.org/blogs/prang; Michael Clapper, "Art, Industry, and Education in Prang's Chromolithography Company," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 105/1 (April 1995): 145-61.

[40] Nina Yolande Du Bois to W.E.B. Du Bois, July 1925, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b028-i278, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst. Thanks to Freeden Blume Oeur for bringing this letter to my attention.

[41] Caroline Goeser, *Picturing the New Negro: Harlem Renaissance Print Culture and Modern Black Identity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 17-56, 111; see also Susan Earle, "Harlem, Modernism, and Beyond: Aaron Douglas and His Role in Art/History," in ed., Susan Earle, *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 5-52.

ist or illustrator drawing silhouettes at the time. For example, Winold Reiss, Laura Wheeler, E. Sims Campbell, Richard Bruce Nugent, James Lesesne Wells, Lois Jones, Miguel Covarrubias, Charles Cullen, Roscoe Wright, Zell Ingram, and Prentiss Taylor crafted this artform for Harlem Renaissance-era magazines and advertisements.[42] Nevertheless, Douglas's established style across different publishing formats raised his visibility. Thus, Douglas's work, and most especially Laura Wheeler's illustrations and sketches for *The Brownies' Book* and *The Crisis*, did not escape Yolande Du Bois's attention.[43]

Yolande Du Bois crafted her own style of silhouetting. Nearly all her silhouettes are young girls or women. They gesture in either playful poses or in some form of physical movement like dancing, jumping, skipping, running, or even roller skating. Most of the silhouettes were singular creations, animated unto themselves, suggesting how Yolande Du Bois thought about the artform's autobiographical potential. Interestingly, her silhouettes appeared on pages in *The Crisis* that featured literary writings such as poetry or fiction, artistic expressions in which she was also interested. By the late 1920s, her silhouettes served as visual accompaniment in six of her father's "Postscript" columns that concluded each issue of *The Crisis*. And in 1928, Yolande Du Bois crafted silhouettes that appeared in advertisements for personally monogrammed *Crisis* stationary.[44]

While Yolande Du Bois's father often inhabited a patriarchal and patronizing disposition towards his daughter, he always provided for her material needs and routinely encouraged her artistic pursuits in the literary and visual arts. Placing her artwork on several *Crisis* covers during the 1920s meant that he endorsed her creative expression. About her artistic talent, Du Bois remarked to Yolande in 1928, "You have a good deal of latent ability in that line and a chance to make a career of it. Or, if not a full career, at least a profitable and inspiring avocation." To further probe the possibility of making art full-time, he encouraged Yolande to "get together the best specimens of your work" and reach out to Harlem Renaissance artists Laura Wheeler, Aaron Douglas, Winold Reiss, and Albert Smith "to get an unbiased and

[42] See the silhouettes reproduced in Gosser, *Picturing the New Negro*, 41, 70, 80, 91, 103, 116, 119, 124, 133, 135, 231, 235, 237, 240, 243, 259, 261-62, 267, 289-90.
[43] Kirschke, "Laura Wheeler Waring and the Women Illustrators of the Harlem Renaissance."
[44] Yolande Du Bois's advertisement artwork appeared in the July 1928 (p. 247), August 1928 (p. 283), and September 1928 (p. 319) issues of *The Crisis*.

thorough judgment of your situation" in the interest of further artist study.[45] Expressing elation that he was "tickled pink to know that you are working hard at your drawing" Du Bois also regularly solicited Yolande's illustrations to feature inside the magazine, asking for her "little sketches."[46]

During Yolande Du Bois Cullen's and Countee Cullen's honeymoon in Paris, Du Bois requested that the couple collaborate on writing travel reports about their cultural experiences abroad. He proposed that Yolande's silhouettes, her "little pen sketches," accompany Cullen's narrative.[47] Ultimately, the couple found themselves unable to work together on the requested travelogues, another dimension of their multiple incompatibilities. However, in his reply to Du Bois, Cullen alluded to his estranged wife's artistic sensibilities observing that "Yolande lives to draw silhouettes."[48]

One final example of Yolande Du Bois's silhouettes in Black print culture shows not just her aesthetic creativity, but also her place as an unsung and overlooked artist of the Harlem Renaissance. The March 1925 issue of *Survey Graphic* stands as a key publication in the New Negro movement's evolution. Its iconic cover featured Winold Reiss's sketch of singer Roland Hayes set against two blue, vertical strips of African art with "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro" emblazoned below Hayes. This visual assembly complemented what readers found inside the issue: more of Weiss's character sketches along with illustrations from other artists; narrative writings by figures such as James Weldon Johnson, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Arthur Schomburg, and poems by Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Anne Spencer,

[45] W.E.B. Du Bois to Yolande Du Bois, May 15, 1928, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b043-i064, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst.
[46] W.E.B. Du Bois to Yolande Du Bois, March 30, 1927, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b175-i574, W.E.B. Du Bois to Yolande Du Bois-Cullen, February 5, 1929, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b048-i059, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst.
[47] W.E.B. Du Bois to Countee Cullen, December 21, 1928, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b178-i463, W.E.B. Du Bois to Countee Cullen, January 10, 1929, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b181-i409, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst.
[48] Countee Cullen to W.E.B. Du Bois, March 2, 1929, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b181-i410, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

among others.[49] In addition, various advertisements appeared throughout the issue, including one the NAACP took out and one that Du Bois purchased for *The Crisis*. As a reflection of its literary stature and signature role in the Harlem Renaissance's backstory, the *Crisis* ad was the first page inside *Survey Graphic*'s front cover.[50]

Noticeable immediately at the bottom of the advertisement are two of Yolande Du Bois's silhouettes. While Du Bois did not identify any of the ad's visual enhancements, knowing the landmark status of the *Survey Graphic* issue it is notable that he chose to adorn the page with two of his daughter's signature silhouettes.[51] Furthermore, unbeknownst except to only a few people, the 42,000 subscribers—and many thousands more readers—who opened the issue's front cover beheld Yolande Du Bois's silhouettes, anonymized as they were at the time.[52]

CONCLUSION

Extracting Yolande Du Bois's silhouettes from her other artistic practices for a moment, it is as if she's recalling her youth via shadow art with the playful, expressive positions in which she renders the young female figures. And given her father's often domineering presence in her life, it is as if Yolande Du Bois used her silhouettes in *The Crisis* to make herself more visible, rendering her artist's marker as a powerful visual contrast to the symbolic weight of her father's editorial pen, even as their creativity sometime intermingled on the same page.

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[49] See "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro," https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/17368696, James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. On the *Survey Graphic*'s historical significance, it is important to note that scholar Alain Locke's editorial curation further bolstered the Harlem Renaissance with his December 1925 book *The New Negro*, the *Survey Graphic* journal issue in book form. See Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 193-94; Joshua M. Murray and Ross K. Tangedal, "Introduction: Editing the Harlem Renaissance," in *Editing the Harlem Renaissance*, 4-5.

[50] "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro," 624. W.E.B. Du Bois saved a clipping of this ad in his personal papers. See "Crisis advertisement, ca. 1925, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b170-i549, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

[51] The baby photo in the ad is of Bobbie Feliza Holmes, winner of the 1924 Oklahoma City NAACP Branch baby contest which paid a $130.20 first prize. Du Bois published annually the winning Branch results in *The Crisis*. See "Baby Contests," *The Crisis*, May 1924, 21.

[52] David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, with a new Preface (New York: Penguin, 1997), 329.

Ironically, as this article has demonstrated, time itself has unveiled and made more visible the shadows that Yolande Du Bois lived with—her beloved silhouettes and the ways that her artwork in the scrapbooks and in *The Crisis* has allowed us to hear her voice on her own terms and in her own way and thus move beyond the symbolic surveillance of her father. Coupled with the details of her artwork, sketches, illustrations, stenciling, and writings noted earlier in this essay, the presence of Yolande Du Bois's art in *Survey Graphic* suggests that she's an overlooked, undervalued, and unsung Harlem Renaissance artist who warrants significantly more attention and analysis. Let the phrase stand on its own: Yolande Du Bois, Harlem Renaissance literary and visual artist.

Without the discovery and archival appearance of her eight scrapbooks whose pages serve as portals to hidden Black history, Yolande Du Bois would likely still reside in her father's shadow as a generally minor figure in the Du Bois

POETRY AND DRAWING

Hail and Farewell
ROSALIE M. JONAS

YOU who have won from agony
Your most consummate, poignant Art,
From torture of the wounded heart,
The soul in torment to get free,
Your transcendental harmony—
You Minstrels of the South, a part
At last of our great Northern mart,
Do not become such slaves as we.

For we have forged us chains of gold
So heavier, so much more base
That our dulled spirit may not rise
And break it's fetters, as of old
Arose the genius of your race,
Circling and singing to the skies.

She Walks Alone
RAYMOND A. CROMWELL

A WINDING line of caps and gowns
Came marching down the campus street
In couples paired; all smiles; no frowns
Upon these faces, youthful, sweet.

But here comes one without a smile.
She marches with her eyes cast down,
As like some loathsome, dread exile—
Her skin is black—she walks alone!

No gracious benedictions hers.
No laughing banter from her friends.
Nay, only biting, silent slurs
Born in white hearts but to offend.

Her wisdom matters not, it seems.
(Her agile brain surpassed their own),
Not even mind or power redeems;
Her skin is black—she walks alone!

The winding line of caps and gowns
Moves on across the cold, gray stone.
In couples paired; all smiles; no frowns—
Save one black girl—she walks alone!

Love
DOROTHY KRUGER

A YOUNG girl speaks:
I thought of love as a placid pool
All silver green and moving light,
Where one could bathe and forever cool
The pounding pulse of new delight;
But love came like a crimson bird
Alighting on my heart to rest
And flew away with unspoken word,
Baring in flight his crimson breast.
The mother answers:
Love rose for me from the hush of dreams

A star more blue than quiet seas,
Drawing my arms, as unbroken streams
Of sunlight draw the arms of trees;
But blue stars tremble and swiftly break
To sink like hearts in moon cold sands,
Or fall to die on a silent lake,
Leaving their dust on outstretched hands.

Color of Genius
(For Langston Hughes)
BENJAMIN MUSSER

THROUGH spirituals, slave songs of the soul,
Sounding the depth of music close to tears;
Through cakewalk's rhythm; through the chanticleer's
Syncopate Blues, ragtime's advance and recoil;
Through suffering and joy you disembroil
Your heritage of immemorial years
Until it sings its freedom, and appears
A poet born of hate and love and toil.

Children? But so are we. Barbaric? Too,
Thus the world scorns our fire and our dream.
If they would hurt you, tear your songs apart,
Know that we suffer and rejoice with you,
Lit from Parnassus by a common gleam:
Color-lines end before the throne of Art.

Bringing Egypt Beauty
HARRY ALAN POTAMKIN

TO Egypt,
benisons from Benin,
Bantu beneficence,
concepts from Congo,
borne by black warriors,
travelers,
chieftains, whose enterprise
was glory.

To Egypt,
for Egypt's use,
ornaments
from Gabun,
ivories and wooden idols.
Egypt might find in them
principle for principal,
beauty consistent with
the beard of the Pharaohs,

intensity
of geometry,
beauty
in line and plane,
intimate
to Egypt's eye.

Black savage
to Egypt bore
in ravage,
in war,
a universe
terse,
but eloquent.

Angela
ARNA BONTEMPS

SO while a lessening glint of sun ray
Loiters golden in your hair,
Pale girl, do you not mourn for memories of the morning?
Would you not stay the failing beam?
We who were born in the night know songs
For the deep, cold watches of gloom.
Lie down, O kith of the glorious day,
And weep while Sorrow sings.

August, 1927 191

Image 1: *Yolande's silhouette and visual art intermingling with poetic art in The Crisis, August 1927, 191. Internet Archive.*

family universe. On the pages of her scrapbooks, she has given us clues to her aesthetic autobiography. She has pointed us to what she found interesting and exciting, to what memories she wished to meaningfully document. Future scholarship on the contents of her scrapbooks can potentially offer new perspectives and dimensions of Yolande Du Bois's life as a student, writer, mother, daughter, lover, teacher, grandmother, dog parent, and artist. As this archival history of her scrapbooks has shown, Yolande Du Bois is no longer hidden from history.

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The Possibility of King's Beloved Community Going Forward

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In the following paper, I explain the underlying philosophical commitments of King's beloved community. I posit three moments of the United States of America's reconstruction: the Founding, the US Civil War, and the civil rights movement. The civil rights qua King's beloved community should be the governing ideal that situates our understanding of what America could be when contrasted against the other Founding moments of the United States. What's more, these challenges persist as we see the work that racial integrationism and beloved community have yet to be sufficiently formed and realized.

KEYWORDS: Martin Luther King, Jr; personalism; beloved community, Love

I COME TO YOU TODAY TO MEDITATE upon the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and how to build toward a future utilizing King's insight.[1] As a philosopher, my duty is to build a bridge from King's written words and texts to some conceptualization of a future yet known, a future we may hope for. In effect, I am thinking about beloved community as reflected in one of his favorite lines borrowed from Theodore Parker, a nineteenth-century Unitarian that King summarized as "the arc of the universe

[1] The following essay is based on a lecture I gave at Bowie State University on April 4, 2023 to commemorate the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. I want to thank Robert Birt for the invitation and Karen Cook Bell who invited me to submit this piece for the new inaugural journal *Freedom: A Journal in Africana Studies.* I look forward to future collaboration in the same spirit that this essay addresses in building community with each other.

bends towards justice."[2] The universe can bend toward justice, but it requires beloved community to do so. An ethics without attention to community is always theoretically incomplete. When asked how King's philosophy might apply to the future and to our present needs in the twenty-first century, one must take stock of its actual commitments. We must understand what his philosophy was in light of its context within the United States at its time. One must carefully attend to the areas of ambiguity present in his words. Sometimes, King is not clear how a mentioned philosophical or theological idea should be understood, and it is the work of scholars to figure how best to interpret him.

In this lecture, I will not argue for the conclusion that I see Martin Luther King, Jr. as a representative and ardent defender of the larger school of Boston Personalism. I will take it for granted; I have exhaustively defended this interpretation elsewhere most recently in my article "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Legacy of Boston Personalism" (2022). Instead, I want to speak to you today about the implications of what personalist philosophy stated and offer the thesis that King's beloved community is the idealization of norms for community that are reflected in personalism broadly construed. In short, King's beloved community would become a normative ideal to which the future and the arch of justice might realize a better world through. Beloved community is an ideal of multiracial democracy rooted in personalist thought. America is "a multiracial nation where all groups depend upon each other…this vast interdependent nation no racial group" where "no racial group can retreat to an island."[3] To put it more succinctly, what is assumed as the backdrop of the Poor People's Campaign is beloved community and if the virtue of our democratic institutions is redeemable or not should be judged through what King meant as beloved community. Beloved community is central to all understanding of his critique of our political and economic institutions.

As with any argument, every argument assumes some level of assumptions to get underway, and I am no different. In the next section, I outline some basic assumptions about the conditions of white supremacy that operate *a tergo* in

[2] Martin Luther King, Jr. "If the Negro Wins, Labor Wins," ed. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986): 201-207. Here, I cite King, "If the Negro Wins, Labor Wins," 207.

[3] Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 63; Hackett J. Edward, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Legacy of Boston Personalism" in *The Pluralist* vol. 17 no. 3 (2022): 45–70.

the United States on a philosophical level and I end on outlining the three reconstructive moments of our nation's collective experience in which the United States had to re-constitute and renew its political authority.

I. WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURAL CONDITIONS, RECONSTRUCTION AND POLITICAL VISIONS

The Founding of the Constitutional Republic of the United States assumes the legitimacy of white supremacist thinking, if not philosophy. John Locke wrote the *Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina* in 1669 that fixed standards for colonizing Virginia to Florida for the next century to come, and in that official document, proposition 110 reads as follows: "Every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over his negro slaves, of what opinion or religion soever."[4] Freemen had "absolute power and authority over [their] negro slaves." Locke draws a distinction between freemen and slave. Such a distinction is baked into the Founding vision of this country.

The Founding Father, Thomas Jefferson, both owned slaves while saying that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness." A performative contradiction to be sure. At the same time, Thomas Jefferson remarked in a letter from 1790, "Locke's little book on Government, is perfect as far as it goes."[5] In the same book, *The Second Treatise on Civil Government,* Locke defends the existence of slavery as won through a just war and we may no doubt speculate that England as a center of civilizing force in the New World could never be unjust.[6] Jefferson approved of Locke. In another letter, Jefferson says of Bacon, Newton, and Locke, that these men were "the three greatest men that have ever lived."[7] In considering Locke the greatest of all men, Thomas Jefferson agreed with him about the inferiority of Negro slaves. Jefferson

[4] John Locke, "Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina, March 1, 1669," Yale Law Library, February 21, 2023, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/nc05.asp

[5] Thomas Jefferson, "Extract from Letter to Thomas Mann Randolph, May 30, 1790," Thomas Jefferson Monticello, February 21, 2023, https://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/1308

[6] Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 67-68. The *Second Treatise on Civil Government* contains provisions against hereditary slavery, but Locke writing the Carolina Constitution and investing in the Royal Africa Company prove as contradictory as the ideals and concrete practices of Jefferson.

[7] Thomas Jefferson, "Extract from Letter to John Trumbull, February 15, 1789," Thomas Jefferson Monticello, February 21, 2023. https://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/2153

wrote in his *Notes on the State Virginia* that while blacks and whites were equal in memory, "in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid: and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous."[8]

Many other examples could suffice for our purposes. The very thinking of America's Founding Fathers assumed the legitimacy of white supremacy, and this white supremacy set the stage from the beginning of the United States. Clearly, if and when we find contemporary American conservatives who think that we should be loyal to the founding vision of the United States, we must demand of them an uncompromising *No* if we are to agree with King. Let me reproduce some words that not only implicate the United States culture that birthed the white supremacy we contend with today but also more provocatively American philosophy.

> Slavery in America was perpetuated not merely by human badness but also human blindness. True, the causal basis for the system of slavery must be to a large extent be traced back to the economic factor. Men convinced themselves that a system that was so economically profitable must be morally justifiable. They formulated elaborate theories of racial superiority...This tragic attempt to give moral sanction to an economically profitable system gave birth to the doctrine of white supremacy. Religion and the Bible were cited to crystallize the status quo. Science was commandeered to prove the biological inferiority of the Negro. Even philosophical logic was manipulated to give intellectual credence to the system of slavery...So men conveniently twisted the insights of religion, science, and philosophy to give sanction to the doctrine of white supremacy.[9]

In these words, King specifically links white supremacy to the socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions of the United States and what I take to be the contexts that generated American philosophy. This system of slavery was birthed in America for economic reasons, what we might call racial capitalism, and entire spheres of culture, including religion, science, and philosophy "give sanction to the doctrine of white supremacy" for that racial capitalism to persist. What's more, notice the present tense in the pre-

[8] Thomas Jefferson, "Extract from the Notes on the State of Virginia, December 1, 1782-January 1, 1782," February 21, 2023, https://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/1314

[9] Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 37.

vious quote. It's "give," not gave. So, our attention today to King's life is to bring these insights as a counter to what presently gives legitimacy to white supremacy. Beloved community is a counterweight, a radical philosophical vision of community, to steer us clear of a world of anti-blackness.

Today, contemporary conservatives have never distanced themselves from the paradigm shift that occurred in the mid-1960s when Barry Goldwater—in running under the Republican nomination for President in the 1964 election—decided to court pro-segregationists as part of his platform. The Republican response to the civil rights movement was to object to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 under the guise of state rights. Even today, the national platform of Republicans mentions nothing about race at all.[10] Republicans are the number one political force attacking African American Studies in College AP courses in Florida and attacking any mention of race as critical race theory in 18 states banning the teaching of the mention of race while not understanding the work of legal scholars in that tradition.[11] While writing this invited lecture in February 2023, more than 200 high schools students in Tuscaloosa walked out in protest of their high school after being told that a Black History Month event couldn't reference anything before 1970.[12] The disconnect between actual history of race and the politics of white grievance politics could be better mediated if we choose a more beloved community orientation for our politics and values. In other words, King's beloved community is the only legitimate source of political theology for the United States and the only working philosophy of community worth endorsing. Now you may ask: the only one worth endorsing?

[10] "The Republican Platform of 2016," GOP.com, February 25, 2023, https://prod-static.gop.com/media/Resolution_Platform.pdf?_ga=2.206536016.293088243.1677387003-776341445.1677387003. The section on "Criminal Justice and Prison Reform" mentions only the lack of support for police from Democratic officials. It says nothing about the reasons why Democrats and progressives largely question police forces for the killing of unarmed Black people. The RNC has also indicated that a new platform will be composed in 2024, but for now, the statement from the 2016 platform holds. One might suspect that the killing of George Floyd has absolutely paralyzed the Republican ability to address race and galvanized the Republican avoidance of race altogether in its utter embrace of White Christian nationalism.

[11] Sara Schwartz, "Map: Where Critical Theory is Under Attack," Edweek.org, February 25, 2023, https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06

[12] No Author Listed, "Students Walk Out After Told to Limit Black History Program," Associated Press News, February 25, 2023, https://apnews.com/article/education-school-curricula-tuscaloosa-alabama-civil-rights-072dd00df78c42094b0e9e7d8298efa2

In answering that question, I'd like to propose that there are three moments when the United States dared to envision what the idea of *America* could be. The first we have already covered in the ideas of Locke and Jefferson. In this period and all the way up to the U.S. Civil War, white supremacy was a presumed assumption of our vision for what America could be.

The second moment of re-envisioning the United States emerged when the breakdown over slavery resulted in the Confederate South no longer hiding the presumed assumption of white supremacy declared war for their white supremacist way of life to continue. At that time, American philosophers flocked to Hegel to solve the problem of the conceptual rift left open from the conflict. In Hegel, two opposites, a positive statement and a negation can be synthesized to form something greater. Hegel became, for some, a wonderful resource to heal, but there's a philosophical story that the enthusiasm for Hegelian dialectics excludes persons of color due the operative assumption of white supremacy yet again.[13]

The third moment is here. Arguably, the civil rights movement, starting with the Montgomery Bus Boycott and perhaps even now is the third reconstructive moment for the United States.[14] One might even say that Nixon's Southern strategy and Reagan's embrace of neoliberal capitalism resists the norms and work of beloved community. Neoliberal capitalism requires that people are out only for their self-interest and if you commodify all aspects of life, then individuating people as consumers, self-interested agents, and the satisfaction of desires generated through capitalism, solidarity is prevented.

[13] Evidence for this claim can be gleaned in William Torrey Harris. Harris, co-founder of the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy,* the oldest philosophy journal in North America, organized the group known as the St. Louis Hegelians. These were a group of scholars fascinated with Hegel's philosophy and yet Harris was an accomplished philosopher and was appointed the first Secretary of Education (what was then called the US Commissioner of Education) in 1889. In this capacity and as a Hegelian, Harris advocated for the kidnapping of Indigenous children and relocating them to civilize them. He wrote, "We owe it to ourselves and to the enlightened public opinion of the world to save the Indian, and not destroy him. We cannot save him and his patriarchal or tribal institution both together. To save him we must take him up into our form of civilization. We must approach him in the missionary spirit and we must supplement missionary action by the aid of the civil arm of the State. We must establish compulsory education for the good of the lower race."

[14] A working hypothesis of this essay is that the civil rights movement never ended, but has been consistently called into question with the continual racist murders of unarmed Black persons, the school-to-prison pipeline, mass incarceration, red-lining, bussing, economic inequality, reparations, and a more honest reconstructive moment yet to happen wherein true integration – beloved community – can be instituted among us.

For this reason, I want to suggest that to overcome and challenge philosophy and our culture, we cannot look to philosophical resources that are blind to white supremacy. We must address what gives it sanction by imagining a world from the victims of white supremacy and their point of view. In short, and speaking somewhat theologically, our duty is to love those who have been harmed. In essence, I agree with Jonathon Walton, that King's thought is invaluable because it "demonstrates that religious commitments need not be inconsistent with the normative values of modern democracy."[15] Quite the contrary, beloved community should be the ideal of contemporary democracy.

II. THE MANY ITERATIONS OF BELOVED COMMUNITY IN KING'S THOUGHT

Beloved community is recognized as the most important concept from the beginning of King's ministry and activism up until his death. Walter Fluker makes this point comparing Thurman and King. "Like Thurman, community is the single organizing principle of King's life and thought."[16] Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp defend that beloved community consumed King from the beginning of his ministry until his death. "The vision of 'beloved community' was the organizing principle of all of King's thought and activity." Therefore, they continue, "All of King's intellectual concerns were directly related to the priority [King] assigned to the beloved community."[17] Lewis Baldwin called it of "critical importance" when situating and understanding King's entire thought since one may find the term from the beginning of the late 1950s until his death in 1968.[18] In addition, King's notion of beloved community is embedded in concepts like "the World House" and what King described as "genuine integration" in *Where Do We Go from Here* (more on this later). The assumption of its presence lurks under the surface of King's life and work. Therefore, I propose a survey of its sources in King's thought. First, we will

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[15] Jonathon L. Walton, "Dignity as a Weapon of Love," in *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* ed. Brandon Terry and Tommy Shelby (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2018): 339-348. Here I cited Walton, "Dignity as a Weapon of Love," 342.

[16] Walter Earl Fluker, *They Looked For a City: A Comparative Analysis of the ideal of community in the thought of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 150.

[17] Kenneth L Smith and Ira Zepp, *Search for Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.,* (Valley Forge: PA, Judson Press, 1974), 119.

[18] Cited here as seen in Burrow, *God and Human Dignity,* 171. See the first opening section of Lewis Baldwin, *Toward the Beloved Communtiy: Martin Luther King, Jr. and South Africa* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1995).

analyze what it means that beloved community is the aftermath of nonviolence and to understand what King meant by beloved community as "genuine integration and the metaphor of the "world house."

As Robert Birt drawing from Rufus Burrow who noted it in Walter Muelder, ontologically, King accepted that persons are not radical individuals. Instead, persons are persons-in-community.[19] There is ample evidence that King accepted this conception. Consider this profoundly metaphysical statement from "The Man Who Was a Fool":

> In a real sense, all life is interrelated. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what I ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.[20]

Elements of this passage are used in his *Letter from the Birmingham Jail* and *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* In this way, King did not just state that personalism was his "most basic philosophical position," but devoted years to figuring out how to conceptualize personalism in his life of activism. Part of that conceptualizing personalism in activism is to assume a world of relations in constant community with others. To say that all are related is to posit that there are ontological relations that permeate our social reality as the very basis of and for community. Those social relations are immanently existent here and unfolding in this very lecture hall or between you and others if you are reading this as a published lecture. Look around you even now, the strangers with whom you share the physical space are more than likely not attempting to harm you. The general default condition of human beings is to be in harmony with each other if the right conditions and values exist concretely between you and all with whom you are physically present. These relations are also ethical as well as social since the normative image of one person's striving sets the limit of what another normative image of a person can be. If a stranger starts having a seizure before you, then you

[19] Robert Birt, "King's Radical Vision of Community" in *The Liberatory Thought of Martin Luther King Jr: Critical Essays on the Philosopher King* (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2012): 157-175. Here I cite Birt, "King's Radical Vision, fn 1 on 172.
[20] King, *Strength to Love, 69.*

could walk away and read this essay elsewhere, but people will fault you for leaving another person in distress.

Likewise, if you were suddenly injured, you would want another to call for help for you, so even in sharing a space with absolute strangers, we owe them the best in us and they, too, by their actions limit what's possible in the same way that I could limit the normative potential of what they might. In this way, community and ethics are linked in the very relations they occur.

King understood that personalism is both an ethical system and metaphysical position. There is an onto-relationality of persons that is the condition for ethics. As Robert Birt wrote: "Community is essentially an ethical relation between human beings—between persons—that enables the flowering of the human personality and the inherent worth of every human being."[21] In King's words, personalism "gave me a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all humanity."[22] In this statement, metaphysics and ethical language of dignity and worth, the language of values, constitutes the two sides of personalism as a metaphysics and ethics. A normative ideal of my realizing inherent dignity in relation to others constitutes their ability to reciprocate in kind. What are the six principles of nonviolence in King's *Stride Toward Freedom* if not but concretizations of the ethical insight that the moral limit of what can be is set by others? In this case, as we will see, the more nonviolence is embraced as a standpoint of social and political reform, the more love and infinite dignity that love fuels can concretize in American political spaces and thus challenge the longstanding belief of American racial supremacy.

Following Rufus Burrow, I do not know if King intended the term "beloved community" to echo or relate in some fashion to Josiah Royce. King never references Royce in his published writings.[23] In private discussion, I have adopted Tommy Curry's interpretation. Curry would say that King's usage of the term "beloved community" is what he is protesting in Royce as Royce had

[21] Birt, "King's Radical Vision of Community," 158.

[22] Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 88.

[23] I am unaware if it appears in unpublished writings. From those unpublished works I have seen, as my access to them is intermittent at best, I do not think King references Royce at all.

written on the Negro question revealing his cultural racist commitments.[24] Indeed, we do not know if he even read where Royce first mentions the term.[25] Regardless of where King heard it, his usage differs significantly. Whereas Royce is writing in the tradition of absolutist pragmatic idealism with a more rationalistic flare, King intends beloved community as a more personalist term, more in line with a commitment to the theological language of the Kingdom of God and realizing the Kingdom of God is based on love in the immanence of daily life.[26] There are two moments that give flavor and context. The first occurs in *Stride Toward Freedom.*

In *Stride Toward Freedom,* King will describe the six principles of nonviolence. In a way, beloved community seems at work constantly without mention in the backdrop. This seems evident with the personalist connection because King inextricably links his intellectual odyssey in the same chapter within *Stride Toward Freedom* with his stated six principles of nonviolence. Elsewhere, beloved community is mentioned in a sermon King delivered in 1959 titled "Palm Sunday Sermon on Mohandas K. Gandhi." In that sermon, King writes: "The aftermath of violence is always bitterness; the aftermath of nonviolence is beloved community."[27] Since this sermon is delivered in 1959, it's reasonable to assume that it carried weight in those principles of nonviolence also in *Stride Toward Freedom* published in 1958, and the same phrasing appears at the end of the second principle of nonviolence in *Stride*

[24] I do not know the date of this conversation with Tommy Curry. It occurred sometime ago while I was teaching at Savannah State from 2017-2020. It could be immediately before the release of his book on the same topic or just afterwards. These two forms of beloved community are drastically different. For more information, see Tommy Curry's *Another White Man's Burden: Josiah Royce and the Quest for Racial Empire* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018), 190-197. In a more detailed analysis, while critical of scientific racism, Royce regarded British colonialism as a civilizing force and even included the Lost Cause and Robert E Lee as positive symbols as to what it meant positively to have loyalty to a cause. The problem is that thinkers like Kipton Jensen are convinced that the elements of King's philosophy can fit snugly inside Royce's philosophy of community so easily that the usage of the same word convinces there is a direct line from Royce to King. For his uncritical interpretation of this direct line of transmission, see Kipton Jensen, "The Growing Edges of Beloved Community: From Royce to Thurman and King" in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* vol. 52, no. 2 (2016): 239-258. Another article that wrongly pushes a line of direct transmission is Gary Herstein's "The Roycean Roots of Beloved Community" in *The Pluralist* vol 4, no. 2 (2009): 91-107.

[25] Rufus Burrow, Jr., *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 164

[26] Burrow, *God and Human Dignity,* 163.

[27] Martin Luther King, Jr. *The Radical King* ed. Cornell West, (Boston: Beacon, 2015), 31. This phrase also

Toward Freedom, "The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community."[28]

One can see beloved community's motivations within the first to the sixth step of nonviolence. First, nonviolent resistance is not a method of cowardice. If someone is nonviolent because of a means of lacking access to weapons or resources, then one is not sincerely interested in nonviolence at all nor is this method passive resistance. Second, "nonviolence does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding." Even if one uses boycotts, marches and the like, these are but means "to awaken a sense of moral shame."[29] Such moral shame respects the integrity and value of persons. Third, nonviolence is "directed against the forces of evil rather than against persons who happen to be doing the evil." Against the forces of evil, the fourth quality is the nonviolent resistor will suffer without retaliating in which "unearned suffering is redemptive."[30] One suffers so that others may learn.

In the fifth principle, King made clear that we are to avoid the external threats of violence, and we are to avoid "the internal violence of spirit." By this phrase, King means a type of "understanding, redemptive goodwill" that is not affectionate, but an agapic love that is "disinterested love."[31] For him, this is love by what the existential phenomenologists might call an orientation of our being in relation to others, and I carry forth this assumption in reading Scheler and King. When King describes how love has an effect in experience, I read him as an existential phenomenologist. In doing so, agape "springs from the *need* of the other person—his need for belonging to the best in the human family." In doing so, King affirms this type of love is at the basis of forming community with others. Instead, King uses the terminology of brotherhood and imagery of the ideal human family for what is best in us. For this reason, agape never discriminates against others. There are no distinctions between worthy and unworthy as one might accept even the worst of one's family because this orientation begins by "loving others *for their sakes.*"[32]

[28] King, *Stride Toward Freedom,* 91.
[29] King, *Stride Toward Freedom,* 90.
[30] King, *Stride Toward Freedom,* 91.
[31] King, *Stride Toward Freedom,* 93.
[32] King, *Stride Toward Freedom,* 93.

Finally, the last sixth principle, that the whole of the universe is moving toward justice, is the culmination of a passage about love that is at the heart of beloved community.

> *Agape* is not a weak, passive love. It is love in action. *Agape* is love seeking to preserve and create community. It is insistence on community even when one seeks to break it. *Agape* is willingness to sacrifice in the interest of mutuality. *Agape* is a willingness to sacrifice in the interest of mutuality. *Agape* is a willingness to go to any length to restore community...It is a willingness to forgive, not seven times, but seven times seven to restore community. The resurrection is a symbol of God's triumph over all the forces that seek to block community. The Holy Spirit is a continuing community creating reality that moves through history. He who works against community is working against the whole of creation. Therefore, if I respond to hate with a reciprocal hate I do nothing but intensify the cleavage in broken community. I can only close the gap in broken community. I can only close the gap in broken community by meeting hate with love. If I meet hate with hate, I become depersonalized, because creation is so designed that my personality can only be fulfilled in the context of community.[33]

In this passage, we see several things that King contributes to personalism. First and foremost, we see that for King love is an existential orientation that enables several features of the interpersonal relations between persons. Chief among them is both the creation of community's possibility to persist into the future as the Holy Spirit manifests between persons to create more bonds that constitute community—this is the second feature as well as the meaning of the phrase "Kingdom of God." In this way and thirdly, the loving orientation enables mutuality. In doing so, the relations between me and you are a "thou" relation; the infinite value of both persons is a reality no matter which way you and me relate.[34] We exist as persons. The fourth feature is that these relations can be broken by foregoing the choice to adopt a loving-orientation towards others. When I act on hatred, I demean the possibility of those relations to manifest again. To act on hatred is to devalue and objectify

[33] King, *Stride Toward Freedom,* 94.

[34] Here, King means Martin Buber, *I and Thou* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970). See especially pp. 62 and 150.

a person by removing them out of being in relation to others. In doing so, I prevent the Holy Spirit from manifesting. Accordingly, the loving relation is what is required for us to participate in the fullness of our Divine nature as created in the normative image of God as infinitely valuable persons.

For King, these ultimate truths affirm that all life is interrelated, and in being so interrelated, we can have deep faith into the future. The possibility of beloved community rests on the faith that results out of this loving orientation. In the loving orientation of another person, I find "the universe is on the side of justice," which is another way of saying that someone's "struggle for justice" reveals "cosmic companionship." So even if someone is not a believer in the Christocentricity of King's social and political ethics, there is a dialectical emphasis on how interpersonal relations acting on a loving orientation work towards social, economic, and political unity. For even the non-Christians...believe in the existence of some creative force that works for universal wholeness. Whether we call it Brahman, or a Personal Being of matchless power and infinite love, there is a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole.[35]

If the universe is bending toward justice, then it requires love that recognizes working toward bringing these disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious wholeness. We find this call for wholeness and disconnection peppered throughout *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* In transitioning to that book, that's the second moment that provides flavor and context to the idea of beloved community. In fact, the title is a question that poses a disjunct between chaos or community. The term "community" hints toward the underlying assumption that the community King is attempting to bring about requires looking at both religious and secular understanding of the dimensions of beloved community.

One might say that *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* is a book in dedicated to the living question of how to achieve beloved community. I locate two senses of beloved community in that text.

First, beloved community is a multiracial ideal within the United States. "A people who began a national life inspired by a vision of society of broth-

[35] King, *Stride Toward Freedom,* 95.

erhood can redeem itself."[36] According to King, the potential for the United States is there, but to bring about that redemption through agapic love, America would have to take stock of its past in an honest way. Within our religious and American heritage, King draws on *the image of God* as "a legacy of dignity and worth" since "every human being has etched in his personality the indelible stamp of the Creator."[37] In other words, since God loves every person infinitely, this love fixes the standard that worth of every person is similarly infinite as the moral law. "The worth of an individual does not lie in the measure of his intellect, his racial origin, or his social position. Human worth lies in relatedness to God."[38] Persons have value to God. Whenever this infinite value to God is recognized, "whiteness and blackness pass away as determinants in a relationship and son and brother are substituted."[39] In beloved community, the social determinants of reality are the expansion of family and brotherhood at the expense of other ontological and social classifications imposed by oppressors. beloved community is, at its core, a metaphysical and ethical view of social reality that states all persons are interrelated and stand in relation to each other.

In order to get to achieve this ideal, we can longer enact policies that treat people instrumentally as a means to an end. Instead, the Holy value of persons must hold sway, even in churches. For King, the churches are places where these efforts start. "The church must take the lead in social reform... And [the church] must lead men along the path of true integration, something the law cannot do." In this passage, the phrase "true integration" and its synonymous counterpart "genuine integration" are logical equivalents to beloved community. "Genuine integration will come when men are obedient to the unenforceable."[40] In other words, beloved community is the only solution when read this way. "The ultimate solution to the race problem lies in the willingness of men to obey the unenforceable."[41] The ultimate solution is to choose a loving orientation towards others and realize the partial fulfillment of beloved community.

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[36] Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 88.
[37] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, 102.
[38] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, 102.
[39] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, 103.
[40] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, 105.
[41] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, 106.

The unenforceable refers to the obligation of respecting the infinite worthy and dignity of another person. These moral obligations are beyond the law. Civil rights legislation may end segregation and other discriminatory practices. Laws cannot convince people to alter and transform their racist hearts. Instead, unenforceable obligations concern "inner attitudes, expressions of compassion" and "one's commitment to an inner law, a law written on the heart...a higher law [that] produces love."[42] In other words, the moral law of King's personalist ethics seeks lower "the barriers to a truly integrated society" if we find "that love is mankind's most potent weapon for personal and social transformation."[43] Whence these ideals are achieved, it's found that white American cannot deny the force such love should have over the heart. This insight leads to the secular and possibly divine passage where King describes beloved community without naming it. "In the final analysis the white man cannot ignore the Negro's problem, because he is part of the Negro and the Negro is part of him. The Negro's diminishment of the white man, and the Negro's salvation enlarges the white man."[44]

Second, beloved community is, then, projected as an analogy for the entire world when we look beyond the United States. As King reminds us later in the same chapter, "The present struggle in the United States is a later chapter in the same story."[45] Beloved community is "the World House,"

> This is the great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a large house, a great "world house" in which we have to live together—black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu—a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.[46]

In other words, overcoming one form of oppression does not mean that there are other social categories and systems that have historically contributed to

[42] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?,* 106.
[43] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?,* 107.
[44] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?,* 107. Implicit here is an unrefined dialectics that may be a synthesis of Hegel and personalism. I have yet to work out how exactly this ontological machinery works. One interesting fact is that King had his Hegel seminar with Brightman, so a personalistic mediated Hegelian dialectic is possible as to what undergirds claim of struggle and working towards wholeness and unity.
[45] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?,* 180.
[46] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?,* 177.

the suffering of others. While acknowledging the diverse problems, King still includes black and white as one example of the unavoidable possibility that peace must be found and such racism is perpetuated through European colonization. These concerns are now global, and any formulation of a global ethics will have to meet them head on. For this reason, the unavoidable possibility takes on a Biblical tone as he describes "all inhabitants of the globe are now neighbors."[47] beloved community's Judeo-Christian roots are clear with the tradition of neighborly love. As King says nearly at the end of this chapter, "This call for a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all men."[48]

Still, this larger sense of beloved community resonates with both racism and economic exploitation. King will go onto themes of Pan-African liberation, South Africa, racial apartheid and address the ontological realities of *homo economicus.* All the while, King insists that we must let the spiritual inner nature of the person take hold against the external material powers of technology, devices, and abundance. Again, even on the international level, King repeats the necessity of the value persons possess in the world house (or beloved community) when we see them for whom they spiritually are. They are, in King's words, "souls of infinite metaphysical value,"[49] and that's how personalists define the value of all persons. In their inescapable and mutual interrelatedness, every person's infinite value establishes the limits of my becoming and vice versa. "'I' cannot reach fulfillment without 'Thou.' The self cannot be self without other selves."[50]

Within this international level, King addresses concretely three threats to the world house qua beloved community, the first is racism. As King puts it, "If Western civilization does not now respond constructively to the challenges to banish racism, some future historian will have to say that a great civilization died because it lacked the soul and commitment to make justice a reality for all men."[51] Indeed, beloved community is first invoked to deal with segregation in the United States. Here, we see it on a larger level precisely because King is addressing "the racism of the white Western world."[52]

[47] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?,* 177.
[48] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?,* 201.
[49] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?,* 191.
[50] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?,* 190.
[51] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?,* 187.
[52] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?,* 186.

Next, King moves on to consider poverty. At this time, King is working on instituting the Poor People's Campaign, and as this text is his last book, it's clear that poverty goes hand and hand with racism. Morally perceived through beloved community, King wants the wealthy nations of the world to put an end to poverty such that nobody should remain unfed and uneducated. While calling for these reforms, King warns against instituting a new form of neo-colonialism, and that is achieved if and when we act on the idea of beloved community.

The final challenge to the world house is war. Having seen the prospect of near atomic war with the Soviet Union during Kennedy's administration, King insists that we must act on the neighborly ethic to love all neighbors. Developed nations cannot desire peace in their utterances when their defense budgets bulge. Instead, a moral awakening is necessary to view that the same mutually interrelated ontological condition holds for all the earth's people. In doing so, King calls for a role that philosophy can play. "Therefore, I suggest that philosophy and the strategy of nonviolence become immediately a subject for study and for serious experimentation in every field of human conflict."[53] A personalist philosophy in which reality hinges on moral foundations in which all persons ought to be treated with infinite dignity in and respect is at the bottom of what the international and national system needs. When conceptualized in this work, the aggregation of these moral laws writ large becomes beloved community.

Just as *Stride Toward Freedom* interpreted beloved community as the aftermath of nonviolence to the point that it became necessary to explain the connection of King's love ethic within nonviolence, so, too, would I like to end on and explain the last two pages that ends on love in *Where Do I Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* The first passage is from the book and the second is King quoting from the First Epistle of John from the King James Version of the Bible:

> When I speak of love, I am speaking of that force which all great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life. Love is the key that unlocks the door to ultimate reality. This Hindu-Muslim-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief about ultimate reality is beautifully summed up in the First Epistle of John:

[53] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?,* 194.

> Let us love one another: for love is of God: and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love...If we love one another, God dwelleth in us us, and his love is perfected in us (1 John 4: 7-8, then 1 John 4: 11-12, KJV).[54]

In these passages, King discerns that an existential standpoint of love is what would hold and constitute the affective bonds of a future not-yet community. For King, the bonds (or relations) are constituted by love. To move people to honor their unenforceable obligations, they must act on love, and King is very aware of the power love holds in the Judeo-Christian tradition. What's more, the reason why love is the key to ultimate reality is that there is a type of seeing that love fuels, and something of this positive vision is discernible in other wisdom traditions. In this way, King ends his longest meditation on the possibility of beloved community in the same way that he ended on the power of love in *Stride Toward Freedom's* Chapter 6: My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence when he spoke of a creative force that moves reality into greater wholeness. I take this as further evidence that, like previous scholars mentioned in this essay, King's thought from the beginning till the end can be united around the theme of beloved community.

Having reviewed two instances of beloved community and the aspirational tones the idea took in his earliest thought in the late 1950s to his last published work in 1967, I am in a decent place to summarize overall those propositions that may be derived from looking at how King conceived of beloved community within the philosophical and theological terms of the vocabulary he employed.

1. Persons may act on an affective orientation of love that opens up the true dimension of seeing another person as infinitely worthy of dignity as the ethical basis of beloved community.

2. The infinite worth of dignity stems from God loving anyone such that we are called to stand in the same relation as God loving another as an earthly responsibility. Even if someone doesn't exactly believe in the Abrahamic God, there are plenty of interpretations of the Divine that get us outside of ourselves to realize that we are all interrelated with each other and that

[54] King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, 201.

love in realizing infinite regard of the other is moving our shared social reality to greater possibilities of unity.

3. Persons exist alongside other persons in community, which ought to be an ethical relation born out of an existential orientation of love.

4. If we act on the feeling acts of love, then we create more positive value into the world and thereby constitute the possibility of our social reality becoming unified in the love that manifests between us.

5. The love manifesting between two persons in mutuality is called the Holy Spirit in Christianity or relational ontology in my explication of personalism elsewhere.

With these five points, I hope we can together forge a pathway forward and read King more generously along philosophical lines he intended. The United States has never fully addressed the sins of slavery, and as a nation, we seem hellbent on preventing any critical discussion in the American South from occurring, and while this lecture was given to Bowie State University, an HBCU in Maryland, it should be mentioned that I inhabit the same pedagogical space of an HBCU in Louisiana at Southern University and A&M College. I have the same hopes as the people I have met at your institution. I hope that someday my students can read these words (or a message like it) and know that they resonate with the soul of every American. To understand King's beloved community and to make it happen should be the goal of everyone. John Lewis has famously said multiple times that he has gotten into trouble for beloved community. That work is now more needed than ever as the state-sponsored lynching of George Floyd has reopened a complete reassessment of the failure of American racial integration that beloved community sought to inaugurate.

Finally, I should add that our attempts at integration, if sincerely realized on a form of love described herein, may not perfectly realize beloved community, but as attacks on democratic institutions from an ever-increasing conservative populism continue, living out these feeling acts of love and what values are picked out in that loving relation, we can attempt to restore and heal both our political and social institutions. Beloved community is an ideal that we can achieve more and more if we habituate ourselves to the empowered concepts undergirding our very act of living out these ideas.

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Cartooning the Beloved Community: Martin Luther King Jr. and Political Personhood in "The Montgomery Story"

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As a visual and textual media, comics have played a significant role in ingraining anti-Blackness into the cultural psyche of the United States. Racist caricatures of African Americans in comic strips and graphic novels have helped to reinforce the notion that Black people are unworthy of the promises and benefits of citizenship as outlined in the United States Constitution. Black cartoonists who were aware of comics' power to preserve racist hegemonic structures also knew that the medium could help to tear down those same barriers. This article explores how Black cartoonists were instrumental in constructing and mobilizing a conceptual community that connected Black readers to one another and to a wider concept of American nationhood and citizenship in service to the marginalized and dispossessed of society. Of specific interest is *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story,* a 1957 comic book which King himself was instrumental in conceptualizing and editing. Told through the eyes of an ordinary, yet determined working-class Black man, the book uses a colorful graphic-novel format to educate readers about effective nonviolent protest. The article discusses not only the role of comics in shaping political discourses about citizenship and belonging, but also illuminates the creative role that King played in enabling the book to respond to the moment.

KEYWORDS: Comics, graphic novels, civil rights, citizenship, activism

INTRODUCTION

One of the main goals of Jim Crow segregation laws—apart from demarcating a clear societal boundary between the races—was to exclude African Americans from the benefits, promises, and ideals of American nationhood

and citizenship. Although various forms of media were complicit in this act of exclusion, comics played a unique role because of their visual, ideological, and cultural currency. As a visual and textual medium, comics employed racist stereotypes that depicted Black subjects as clownish, lazy, and semiliterate figures who were content with their second-class status. The ingraining of anti-Black stereotypes in the national psyche reinforced the notion that citizenship and nationhood were out of reach for Black people. However, Black cartoonists who were aware of comics' power to preserve hegemonic structures knew that the same medium could help to tear down those barriers.

This article seeks to advance the study of Black comics and cartoons by focusing on the role that Black cartoonists played in not only advancing civil rights, but also in pushing readers to engage critically with notions of Black personhood and citizenship through comics and sequential art. I argue that through their visuality and narrative, African American comic books and comic strips were instrumental in constructing and mobilizing a conceptual community that connected Black readers to one another and to a wider concept of American nationhood and citizenship in service to the marginalized and dispossessed of society. The text of particular interest to my discussion is *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story,* a 1957 comic book which King himself was instrumental in conceptualizing and editing. This article provides a glimpse into ways that Black comic creators were thought partners with civil rights thinkers and activists in challenging notions of American personhood and citizenship that privileged whiteness and marginalized Blackness.

UNDERSTANDING PERSONHOOD AND CITIZENSHIP IN AMERICAN COMICS

People of African descent in the United States have long had a complex relationship with popularly constructed notions of American personhood and citizenship. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights, two hallowed documents within the US public imagination, were designed within the framework of legally sanctioned enslavement by white men who claimed ownership of human property. The Constitution referred to Black people as being "three-fifths of all other Persons."[1] For generations afterward, Black people were governed by an institutionalized network of Jim Crow laws that mapped segregation and inequality onto every facet of American public and private

[1] "Article I, Section 2: House of Representatives, Clause 3: Seats." *Constitution Annotated,* United States Congress, https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/article-1/section-2/clause-3/.

life, including education, finance, employment, entertainment and leisure, and healthcare, among other areas. In response, Black leaders differed on how to best understand one's place as a Black person within the nation-state. Some leaders, such as Marcus Garvey, advocated for a voluntary return to Africa,[2] while others proposed the creation of an autonomous Black nation within U.S. borders, such as the Republic of New Afrika;[3] others promoted a self-contained, self-reliant Black ecosystem socially separate from but politically concomitant with the US, such as Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee.[4]

Still others, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, challenged Black readers in his 1926 address to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to critically assess the implications of American personhood for Black people: "What do we want? What is the thing we are after?... We want to be Americans, full-fledged Americans, with all the rights of other Americans. But is that all? Do we want simply to be Americans?"[5] Literary scholarship illustrates that, true to Du Bois's question, Black writers have mobilized print culture and cultural production to demand more than only privileges and rights. According to Derrick Spires, "Black writers argue for more than simple inclusion; indeed, they argue for the kind of political world in which they would not have to make such an argument."[6] The argument for expanding the parameters of American belonging was evident in the pages of Black newspaper comics during the Golden Age of Comics, which comics historians place roughly between the late 1930s and early 1950s.[7] Cartoonists such as Jackie Ormes often portrayed Black women and girls in the pages of the Black-owned Pittsburgh Courier who humorously interrogated the concepts of citizenship and Black personhood.[8]

Comics provide a unique venue through which cartoonists build consensus around imagined configurations of personhood and citizenship. In their

[2] John Henrik Clarke, ed., *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa.* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2004.)

[3] Edward Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

[4] Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1986).

[5] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art," in *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 60.

[6] Derrick Spires, *The Practice of Citizenship: Black Politics and Print Culture in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 3.

[7] Lou Mougin, *Secondary Superheroes of Golden Age Comics* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2019).

[8] Nancy Goldstein, *Jackie Ormes: The First African American Woman Cartoonist* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

book, *Redrawing the Nation*, Latin American comics scholars, Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste and Juan Poblete, state that comics have historically provided Latin American readers with "codes, plots, and strategies" necessary for visualizing and situating themselves within the process of national modernization[9]; this conceptualization can be extended to explain how comics have helped white Americans to define citizenship and determine their own relationship to the American national project. During the Golden Age of Comic Books, citizenship was almost exclusively synonymous with American whiteness. This is particularly true for the superhero genre and the many characters who fall within it, such as Superman, Batman, and perhaps most obviously, Captain America.

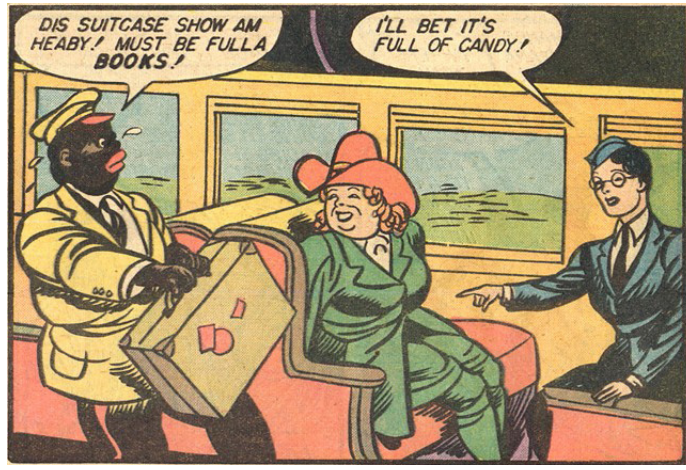
These superheroes exemplify both the extraordinary and the ordinary, the exceptional man and the common man, therefore allowing the reader (and particularly white children) to self-identify with both character types. Such comic books create a dichotomy between good and evil by imperiling the lives of honest, decent, hard-working people by nefarious villains. Also, because superhero comics were so popular, they were vital in instilling such notions of good and evil, patriotism and nationalism in children—notions which would reproduce themselves over generations. By upholding moral values that characterize just societies, the superhero also upholds the rights of the citizen and assumes the duties of his citizenship.

Newspaper comics also played a crucial role in disseminating ideas about the white American citizen. Whereas the superhero comic book casts the citizen within the context of the fantastic, the newspaper comic strip reflects the mundane realities of white America. Strips such as "Hi and Lois,"[10] "The Family Circus,"[11] and "Gasoline Alley"[12] portrayed working-class and middle-class white Americans living their lives, going to work, and raising their families. Most of these strips were set in racially and culturally homogeneous small towns and promoted ideas such as family values and community engagement. Such characters and comic strips provided white readers with a mirror and affirmed the importance of family, community, and country amid

[9] Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste and Juan Poblete, eds. *Redrawing the Nation: National Identity in Latin/o American Comics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 3.
[10] Brian Walker and Greg Walker. *Hi and Lois: Sunday Best* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2004).
[11] Bil Keane. *The Family Circus: The Complete Comics from the Beginning, 1960-61* (San Diego: IDW Publishing, 2009).
[12] Frank King and Dick Moores. *Gasoline Alley: Volume One* (San Diego: IDW Publishing, 2012).

unsettling political dramas such as World War II, the Cold War, the Communist Red Scare and the rising civil rights movement.

However, while comics normalized and validated the everyday experiences of the white American citizen, they also had a reverse effect: they purposely isolated and dehumanized the Black subject, thereby communicating to Black people that they were not owed the right to citizenship. According to J. Stanley Lemons, minstrel shows lampooning African Americans were the first nationally popular and uniquely American form of entertainment; from these performances emerged derogatory caricatures of Black people that saturated print culture.[13] Examples of Black stereotypes in early American and Western media are ubiquitous, from Thomas Rice's 1830 portrayal of the minstrel character, "Jump Jim Crow" (which served as the namesake of segregation)[14] to the portrayals of Black people as dim-witted and generally unintelligent in popular comics books such as *Wonder Woman*.[15] Such visual representations of Black people not only sought to humiliate Black readers and objectify Blackness, but also formed a set of discursive practices that reduced Black readers to objects lacking the full dimensionality of the human experience.



[13] J. Stanley Lemons, "Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880—1920," *American Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (1979): 102.

[14] Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 51.

[15] Tim Hanley, "Cary Elwes and Tracie Thoms Join Wonder Woman Cast." *Tim Hanley*, March 5, 2011, https://thanley.wordpress.com/2011/03/05/cary-elwes-and-tracie-thoms-join-wonder-woman-cast/.

This trend was not only confined to comics, but was a transmedia phenomenon, occurring in radio programs (*The Fibber McGee and Molly Show*, *Beulah*), television shows (*Amos and Andy*, *The Little Rascals* and cartoons such as *Tom and Jerry*), films (*Gone With the Wind*, *Tarzan*) and music (various state anthems romanticizing slavery and plantation life, minstrel showtunes), among other media. Often these cultural texts employed visual and conceptual stereotypes about African Americans that had origins in white social spaces. Rooted in racist ideas about Black physicality and skin complexion, many comics equated certain physical features with abnormality, grotesqueness, poverty, and lack of education.

Though comics have mobilized stereotypes and racist ideologies to shape readers' political consciousness, the same medium can also work in the reverse. The very technologies of power that participate in the perpetuation of systemic racism and misguided stereotypes can also tear those same structures apart. Black comics creators recognized this duality and used it to create comics that articulated a politics of Black personhood and citizenship that countered the Anglocentric and xenophobic worldviews that pervaded the comics pages.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. AND THE *MONTGOMERY STORY*

One such comic that participated in this project was *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story,* produced in 1957 by the Fellowship of Reconciliation (which I will refer to hereafter as FOR), a humanitarian organization dedicated to peacemaking and improved human relations.[16] In 1958, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was then an emerging young minister at the

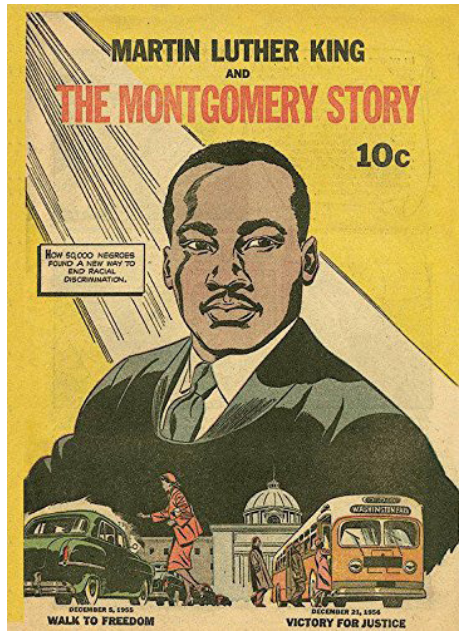
[16] Organized in 1914 in Germany by a group of religious leaders and war objectors, FOR's mission has been to "spread the Kingdom of Heaven, the Rule of God...To stop war, to purify the world, to get it saved from poverty *and* riches, to make people like each other, to heal the sick, and comfort the sad...to find God in everything and in everyone" (Dekar 18). Originally, the organization was founded to brainstorm solutions to stave off the outbreak of World War I, but failed in that regard—the war began as the founders convened the inaugural meeting. For further reading on FOR, see Paul R. Dekar, *Creating the Beloved Community: A Journey with the Fellowship of Reconciliation* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing, 2005).

forefront of the successful Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott,[17] formed an alliance with the organization. Although FOR was not the main organizational mechanism through which Dr. King did his work, he often described the similarity between FOR's objectives and the philosophical underpinnings of his work. As a way of amassing support for the civil rights movement and touting the effectiveness of nonviolent protest, FOR commissioned the creation of a comic book about the success of the Montgomery bus boycott. The decision to create a mini-comic book about civil rights was novel at the time, considering the political tension that gripped the nation. The Cold War was in full swing and Senator Joseph McCarthy's Communist witch hunt paralyzed the United States Congress—and the country as a whole—with fear. As a measure of safeguarding the nation's children and ensuring their patriotism, forms of media that appealed to young people were closely policed. Comics did not escape this surveillance.

Many popular comics had taken an edgy turn in genre, focusing heavily on gratuitous violence, horror, and sexual themes. The New York-based psychiatrist, Frederic Wertham[18] was a notable critic of comics and believed they posed dangers to the child psyche. In 1954, he testified before Congress about the perversity of the art, showing visual excerpts of particularly gruesome comic books such as *Tales From the Crypt* aimed at children as young as seven. Whereas newspaper comics such as "Peanuts" and "Gasoline Alley" maintained solid readerships, comic books were seen as tools of juvenile delinquency and moral decay. White parents' anxieties about comics and compromised national loyalties were compounded by the rise of the civil rights movement.

[17] The 1955-1957 Montgomery bus boycott is considered by many historians to be the pivotal event that set the modern American civil rights movement in motion. On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a Black seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama, wearily boarded a bus at the close of a particularly tiring work day. When the bus began to fill and more white passengers demanded seating, the driver ordered her to surrender her seat. Parks quietly refused, and her arrest spurred civil rights leaders such as Dr. King, E.D. Nixon, and others to mobilize Montgomery's Black community in a successful year-long boycott of the transit system. For more on the bus boycott, see Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Random House, 1987).

[18] During the Communist scare of the 1950s, Wertham was the nation's leading anti-comics voice. His 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocent* informed Congress's implementation of the Comics Code, a parental advisory-style ratings system that regulated comic books. See Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).



No particular artist or writer was given credit for the artwork or writing of *The Montgomery Story;* however, comics scholar Andrew Aydin[19] notes that Alfred Hassler, who was then FOR's Director of Communications, was the originator of the concept for the book. Hassler collaborated with Benton Resnik, a publishing associate with connections in the comic book industry (which had begun to crumble under the weight of political pressure and negative public opinion towards comic books), and FOR eventually received funding to create a manuscript draft that was sent to King to ensure its historical and cultural accuracy. In a letter to Hassler, King pointed out:

> On page 16, box 1 you state that [E.D.] Nixon was the first person to be indicted. I don't think this is actually the case. The Grand Jury indicted everybody simultaneously. Neither was Nixon the first to be arrested. Ralph Abernathy was the first to be arrested. On page 20, box 5 you quote the Negro woman who was slapped: "I could really wallop her—she is smaller than me." Actually, there was a white man who slapped the Negro woman. In order to be more in line with

[19] For more on Aydin's research on *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story,* see Andrew Aydin, "The Comic Book That Changed the World," *Creative Loafing,* August 1, 2013).

> the facts it would be better to say: "I could really wallop him—he's smaller than me!"[20]

As King's letter suggests, the making of *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story* was a highly deliberate and intentional process. Mindful of the fact that comic books were not highly regarded within the mainstream public sphere, FOR and Dr. King tailored the text to appeal to particularized audiences, two of whom included semiliterate readers and strong supporters of the civil rights movement. A close reading of the visuality and narrative of the book reveals a deeply concerted effort by FOR to engage these publics, as well as promote ideas such as social justice and equality. More subtly, the text also raises up King as an emerging leader: the title of the book bears his name, and his illustrated image is displayed prominently at the top of the cover. Below him are images evocative of the boycott. An African American woman, poised and fashionably dressed, flags a passing car—perhaps it is a taxi, or a friend—and reaches for the door handle, about to enter. Underneath her is the caption: "DECEMBER 5, 1955"—the day the boycott was born—"WALK TO FREEDOM." Juxtaposed next to the boycott scene is another scene in which African Americans are boarding a bus.

Underneath that image is another caption: "DECEMBER 21, 1956: VICTORY FOR JUSTICE," alluding to the success of the boycott and the newly democratized transit system. The book is also mindful of situating the Black reader as the "everyday" American citizen, just as newspaper comics were focused on upholding white Americana as a cultural exemplar. Although the title of the book bears Martin Luther King's name, the character at the heart of the story is actually a working-class Black man in Montgomery. The man instructs the reader to "Call me Jones. My name doesn't matter. But my story's important for you as well as me. We're all caught up in it one way or another!"[21] From Jones's very first lines, the formation of Black political personhood begins to take shape. The phrase "Call me Jones" underscores both Jones's "everyman" quality (particularly striking since most "everyman" characters in comics of this period are white males) and his effectiveness in reclaiming a famous phrase from the American literary canon. Visually, his body language also highlights his presence. He leans forward within his pan-

[20] Andrew Aydin, "Comic Book."

[21] *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story* (New York: Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1957), 2.

el, making direct eye contact with the reader and signaling his investment in connecting with us.

Many aspects of Jones's professional and personal life would resonate with Black readers of the time, and particularly with working-class Black men. He resents segregation and the cultural/legal demotion of Black citizenship; we see him drying cars at a car wash and being told by an impatient white businessman, "Snap it up, boy. I want that car in a hurry."[22] Jones tells us that the Jim Crow order of the South has him nervous, as it does many other Black people. He keeps a gun locked away in a desk in his house and wrestles with himself internally on whether or not he could ever bring himself to use it if necessary. "I'm a peaceful man," he says, "but I have a gun. For a long time I thought I might have to use it someday. Now I don't know."[23] To further complicate matters, he has a wife and baby son, and worries about whether he'd ever have to use his gun to defend his family. Not only does Jones enable Black readers to self- identify with a Black character, but he also embodies the moral and philosophical complexities posed by segregation. These complexities are wrapped within internal conflicts regarding

[22] *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story,* 2.
[23] *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story,* 2.

peacefulness versus violence and the significance of courage within manhood, marriage, and fatherhood.

As a way of grappling with his frustrations, Jones decides to take action. He gathers together some of his closest friends and suggests they protest Montgomery's segregated mass transit by boycotting the buses. The men mimeograph a flyer lamenting Rosa Parks's recent arrest for not giving up her seat to white passengers; they then circulate the flyers around Montgomery's Black professional community, and the announcement eventually reaches the local newspaper. As the word spreads, more Black people feel empowered to participate in the bus boycott, and Jones finds himself more politically active, eventually joining the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA)[24] and electing Martin Luther King as the group's president. Through Jones's political transformation, the reader becomes politically transformed as well, and the process of creating political personhood is set in motion.

By portraying ordinary African Americans engaged in the visual representations of political activism—mimeographing sheets, attending public meetings, strategizing in groups—the text enables the reader to see him or herself as a political actor with the power to change unjust laws and even the course of history. Just as the ordinary Black men and women of Montgomery are empowered to correct the inequalities instigated by segregation, the reader is instructed to envision themselves as equally deserving individuals whose duty is to demand full equality from the state. The text even acts as a literal mobilizer and rallying cry for readers through the depiction of a preacher warming up his congregation, a familiar sight to many Black readers. He stands at the lectern during an MIA meeting as if he is presiding over a congregation in a church; he also engages in some verbal call-and-response with the citizens gathered:

Preacher: Are we going to ride those buses?
Congregation: NO!
Preacher: Are we going to walk with the feet God gave us?
Congregation: YES!
Preacher: Yes! Better to walk with dignity...than ride in humiliation![25]

[24] The Montgomery Improvement Association was a civic organization founded by Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, and other Black ministers and community leaders in Montgomery to coordinate the 1955 bus boycott. For further reading on the MIA, see Martin Luther King, Jr. *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper, 1958).
[25] *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story,* 5.

In spite of bitter and sometimes violent resistance from racist whites in Montgomery, Jones and the MIA successfully convince the city to desegregate the public transit system. Surprisingly, *The Montgomery Story* does not end with Blacks riding the buses. At the end of the book is an educational and instructional addendum showing readers how to put into practice the principles of nonviolent resistance in order to make actionable social change in their own lives. Although unusual for a comic book, this section brings the book's investment in political personhood full circle. Narrated by the cartoon version of King, the section explains how social leader Mahatma Gandhi incorporated nonviolence into his 1919 campaign in India against British imperialism.

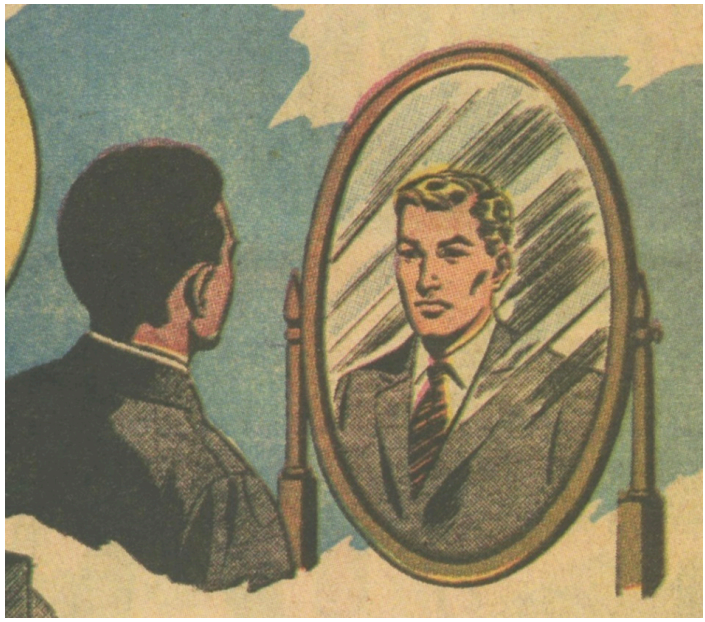
After making clear the costs of nonviolence—including the loss of some human lives— King demonstrates how to put nonviolence to work in an American context. In a subsection headlined "How the Montgomery Method Works," King runs through a series of pointers grounded in Christian theology: "Remember that *you* can do something about [your] situation. God says *you* are important…God loves your enemy, too, and that makes *him* important to you…You have to stop seeing him as your enemy."[26] Beside the narrated text, the illustrations show a Black man looking into a mirror and seeing the reflection of a white man, underscoring the human interconnectedness that King references.

The pairing of King's instructions with the visual applications crystallizes for the reader what the realization of Black political personhood looks like: not only is it the attainment of political rights and privileges, but also a fundamental understanding of how citizens should matter to one another. Just as King believed that the civil rights movement presented a "glorious opportunity to inject a new dimension of love into the veins of our civilization,"[27] this comic book injects a new dimension of political awareness and racial consciousness into the reader.

In the decades since *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story* was published, Black Americans have made significant economic and political advances. However, the racial, social, and political problems that continue to plague

[26] *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story,* 12.

[27] Martin Luther King Jr. "'Facing the Challenge of a New Age,' Address Delivered at the First Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change." *The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute*, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/facing-challenge-new-age-address-delivered-first-annual-institute-nonviolence.



Black America serve as grim reminders of how American notions of personhood and citizenship still contradict the daily realities experienced by Black people in the US. Comics still have the unique innate ability to respond to these issues because of their dual visual and textual nature.

Visually, comics take African Americans out of the realm of the ethnic "other" and place them on a playing field on which they set the terms. Whether the comic in question is Morrie Turner's "Wee Pals," a strip which uses a multicultural cast of children as mouthpieces for keen social and political commentary, or Barbara Brandon-Croft's strip "Where I'm Coming From," which delves into the lives of ordinary, professional African American women, comics have the ability to resonate with a wide range of audiences by showing America as it is, giving visibility to distinct racial, ethnic, and religious identities while simultaneously engaging a majority of readers. For example, following the success of the 2018 film, *Black Panther,* essayist and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote the text for an installment of the Black Panther Marvel series, using narrative to reframe old notions of the traditional American superhero comic.

As a new generation of Black cartoonists and graphic artists continue to grapple with W.E.B. Du Bois's age-old question, "how does it feel to be a

problem," comics have the potential to dramatically reshape how issues of race, citizenship and political personhood are addressed within our mainstream discourse.

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Twice as Hard: A Black Parable for Existing in Higher Education

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"You have to work twice as hard to be seen as half as good" is a Black parable that many African Americans have been indoctrinated with. This belief is not new and has roots deriving from both the politics of respectability[1] and anti-Black racism that exists in the American context. This ideology provides the rationale for the ever-thriving desire to be considered Black and excellent or, as Dr. Imani Perry calls it, *Black exceptionalism*, where all versions of Blackness are measured against it and either accepted or rejected with due course.[2] This article highlights the lived experience of eight stakeholders at a predominantly white university (PWI), who are all Black, and who agreed to talk with me regarding the performance of diversity and the souls of Black folks in a larger study. This article specifically discusses one of the findings titled *twice as hard.*

KEYWORDS: PWIs; campus stakeholders; twice as hard; Black parables; higher education; liberation; performative diversity; critical race theory

EVERYTHING WE DO; WE DO IT FULL OUT!

One of the most important lessons that many African American people are socialized into is never to be seen as lazy. Although African Americans descend from those stolen to and enslaved on this land, worked until blood was drawn and exploited in every way imaginable, rest is never an option. On the campus of Portland State University, May 30, 1975, Ancestor Toni

[1] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 251–74, https://doi.org/10.1086/494730.
[2] Imani Perry, *More Beautiful and More Terrible: The Embrace and Transcendence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

Morrison told us that "there will always be one more thing,"[3] and she was right. Regardless of how hard African Americans work, how bright Black people are, and how far they soar, there will always be small reminders that their existence will never be enough. It is because of the many versions of anti-Blackness that exist that African Americans often feel like they are living in a hamster wheel. Running and running, spinning and spinning, until exhaustion, with no relief in sight.

Even the many talented African Americans who many Black people revere face this parable. Black people educate ourselves and overwork ourselves so that no one can credibly deny our greatness. However, the major lesson that many Black people forget is the one where we intentionally release ourselves from the desire to appease the oppressor. For cultural context, Beyoncé herself is not above this lesson. She has, with her exceptional talent, accumulated thirty-two Grammy awards, currently the most of any artist.[4] It would be fathomable to believe that this great feat alone would be enough to earn her the respect of her peers within every genre of music within the recording academy.

Regardless of her incredible talent, the one thing that even the great Beyoncé cannot leapfrog is her Blackness. Her world-renowned Renaissance tour that brought out the likes of every current celebrity, as well as everyday working-class folks, is still not enough for the white ruling class to perceive her, as Max Weber describes, prestigious.[5] She has had to defend her Black Texan roots as proof that she *is* country music—a genre that African Americans ourselves created, like rock & roll, hip hop, rhythm & blues, and gospel. White folks believe that they are best at denying Black people entry into even the spaces that Black people created with our own blood, toil, tears, and sweat—an offensive travesty. Her recent Netflix-sponsored, NFL half-time show, dubbed the Beyoncé Bowl, is a direct response to white folks' rejection and a statement that she—and we—are no longer asking for permission to take up space.

[3] Portland State University, Toni Morrison, Primus St. John, John Callahan, Susan Callahan, and Lloyd Baker, "Black Studies Center Public Dialogue, Part 2," Special Collections: Oregon Public Speakers, 90 (1995): 11, https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/orspeakers/90.
[4] Grammy Awards, "Beyoncé," 2025, https://www.grammy.com/artists/beyonce-knowles/12474.
[5] Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

BLACK PARABLES

Beyoncé's insistence on taking back musical genres that were stolen from us is undoubtedly a real-time writing of a parable of resistance. Parables are defined as simple, non-complex stories, that are used to illustrate a lesson about morality or spirituality, most specifically as told by Jesus in the Gospels. The stories of the Black lived experience within any context of the American social experiment are always heavily scrutinized through the lens of anti-Blackness, intra- and intergroup. It is important to note that Black stories could not be written down for a few reasons: (1) it was a death sentence if the enslaved were taught to read and write[6] and (2) writing down information makes it easier for it to be co-opted or stolen. Therefore, like the enslaved, Black folks must pass the story from person to person like a Black *griot*. Black people are responsible for how our stories are told and how our counternarratives are applied to push back against anti-Black measures aimed at erasing them.

Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993) is one such work that has resonated through time and has allowed for many to be in relationship with counternarratives of Black storytelling. Butler's work weaves in historical context, faith-based experiences, and the realities of existing during a time when capitalism in the form of corporate greed, climate change, and wealth disparity destroyed lives. The time of Butler's preeminent parable text was about now. We currently exist in a country where billionaire oligarchs' ghost-run our country alongside twice-impeached, insurrectionist-inciting, hate-mongering, sociopathic narcissists, who see our liberation as an uncomfortable suggestion that they could do without. Higher education, a place that both provides and restricts access, often operates as a place of uncertainty for Black campus stakeholders. Regardless of how well African Americans perform, how much we give, and how much we take, the opinions of racist wealthy white men will always determine to whom our freedom belongs, they feel.

The interesting thing about white liberalism within the context of the American social experiment and the system of higher education is that it, at minimum, is fickle. White liberals, who are moderate-leaning, have the casual ability to be an ally or an oppressor. Depending on what day you catch them,

[6] Janet Dustman Cornelius, *"When I Can Read My Title Clear": Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (United States: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 4.

your rank at the institution, and your pedigree, you might experience both. Your value to the institution and your value to whiteness always determine how far they let you rise within higher education and the halls of academia—always chipping away at the core of your being and your Blackness with the intensity and fervor of reunited absent lovers. The ingenuity and flexibility of whiteness allows its membership the ability to enter and exit when and if necessary, so long as they agree to operate in preservation of whiteness.

White privilege is why it is so easy for a pissed-off white lawmaker to run for office as one political party and then switch parties once elected. I will not bore you with painting a picture of the juxtaposition of a Black lawmaker engaging in such a performance because we all know how that would end. White liberals, within the context of higher education, believe that hiring and promoting singular Black individuals means that they have somehow atoned for the misdeeds of their ancestors. However, within the moment of any slight inconvenience, they will remind you to which group they hold their membership dear. One of the first Black parables that is passed down to new academics is to play the game. *The game?* Yes, the one where you do your very best not to upset whiteness until you are tenured.

At which point, I suppose, your liberatory praxis might re-emerge like the phoenix, waging war against all of the misdeeds you, and other marginalized folks, have experienced on your journey toward tenure. Higginbotham teaches us that it is imperative that race be considered in any legitimate analysis of power.[7] Teaching new practitioners of higher education and academics to be docile and demure without a real conversation on the power dynamics that call for such a performance is inherently anti-Black. The idea that a person rooted in disrupting the status-quo enters academia, puts down their rage to earn tenure, and then picks it back up to lead other practitioners and academics toward liberation is comedic at best and asinine at worst.

RESPECTABILITY POLITICS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The *politics of respectability* have been used to disarm white anger and make Black folks feel that it is a worthy cause of which to pledge our allegiance. Quite the contrary, because the politics of respectability have only been useful in making Black folks more palatable to whiteness and unrecognizable to Black resistors and the fight for liberation. A key element in existing in

[7] Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History."

higher education as a resistor is to always be recognizable to the people you are fighting for. Regardless of the accolades, citations, awards, and endowed opportunities, the core of your work must remain situated in liberating Black folks, not assimilating into whiteness. This is no easy task, and it is why so many people put down their arms the moment they accept this first parable of entering the halls of academia as presented by the respectable.

The second parable is *publish or perish*: the idea that in order to keep your position, you must always be publishing. The core to this belief is also publishing in places that are not accessible to the public and the people who look most like you. Hidden behind paywalls and fancy invites exists the belief that in order for you to make it within academia your work can only be found in places that whiteness frequents, or it is not considered "rigorous" and up to standard. I personally have never witnessed any Black person in my proximity not connected to academia read paywalled journal articles. I have, however, watched them read *JET*, *Ebony*, *Essence*, *Black Enterprise Magazine*, fraternity and sorority journals, and everyday newspapers. These are the places that our people frequent that highlight Black existing through struggle and celebration. These venues operate as the sites and hosts of our freedom words.

A core connection between the politics of respectability and Black folks is Black religiosity. Our connection with religion is ancestral and was also reinforced as a means of coping with our enslavement and forced captivity. However, our relationship with religion has morphed into something much larger than freedom-fighting and survival. In many ways, Black religiosity has co-opted white oppressive norms and is deeply committed to further marginalizing already-othered Black folks.[8] Teaching us how to assimilate in ways that erase us and our individual and collective identities for the sole purpose of white acceptance is deeply problematic. Although many who exist in academia would take you to the grass over such a bold assessment.

How African Americans view and see professional Blackness springs forward from how we conceptualize our *Sunday best*. Appearance and demeanor are essential attributes of how respectable Blackness not only shows up on Sunday for church, but also how it shows up for work on Monday. Regardless of where a Black person grew up in this country, we were all force-fed these

[8] Frederick Engram, "Higher Education and Its Ongoing Relationship with Anti-Blackness," *International Forum of Teaching and Studies* 20, no. 2 (2024): 66–68, https://www.americanscholarspress.us/journals/IFST/pdf/IFOTS-2-2024/IFOTSv20n2-art6.pdf.

parables of respectability. It only makes sense that these teachings would follow those of us who do not reject them early on, into academia. Okello invites us to consider that admirable Black behavior, respectability, and achievements considered extraordinary (Henryism) are what produced one of respectability's most fervent advocates, Booker T. Washington.[9] When we conceptualize Washington's teachings as a free pass for making Black folks feel like our hard work is only worthy if it meets the needs and demands of whiteness, without overstepping and creating panic, it further emphasizes the weight of their opinion upon our living condition.

Booker T. Washington operated as one of African Americans' early heroes. He rose out of oppression and into a beacon of admirable, respectable society, so it only makes sense that many of our elders strived to be like him and others of his ilk. What must also be understood is that when we view many of these fore-heroes through a contemporary lens, much of their efforts to appease whiteness actually worked against Black folks and were operationally anti-Black. Washington's perspective allowed for there to be an upholding of Blackness as inferior, which provides a contradiction given that he himself was Black. As stated by Okello, Washington's "bootstraps ideology" served him well but ultimately did not and does not serve the Black collective well at all.[10] So why is that lesson still being passed onto new higher education practitioners and academics?

By the numbers, African Americans are not the majority of tenure-stream or tenured faculty in academia. In fact, we are lumped into the 26 percent of the total population of folks considered of color and on the tenure track.[11] Our numbers are not sizable and as such it makes sense that we mentor and advise our students who intend to enter academia to do good work, but most importantly, to be themselves. Teaching people to murder the parts of themselves that make them unique while simultaneously teaching them to pour that uniqueness into their approach to scholarship is counterproductive,

[9] Wilson Okello, "Organized Anxiety: Respectability Politics, John Henryism, and the Paradox of Black Achievement," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 24, no. 4 (2021): 523–41, https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1798916.
[10] Okello. "Organized Anxiety."
[11] Kathryn Palmer, "Tenure and Promotion Barriers Persist for Women, Faculty of Color," Inside Higher Ed., May 3, 2024, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2024/05/03/tenure-and-promotion-barriers-persist-women-faculty-color.

anti-Black, and hypocritical. The parable that should be passed down is the one stated by Audre Lorde: *your silence will not protect you.*[12]

BLACK EXCEPTIONALISM IS A DEATH SENTENCE

Black exceptionalism is a death sentence for the soul. It calls for us to be exceptionally Black at all times, which is not humanly possible. Some days we need to be *rested Black*, *fed-up Black*, *lazy Black*, *well-supported Black*, and *I am not doing anything else Black*. Take a note from the sistas of the 92 percent who after the 2024 presidential election have decided that they are taking a seat and everyone else will deal. The responses from white women and other people of color have not been in support of our sistas choosing rest for themselves. They have been expressing their demands that Black women not choose themselves for once.[13] The innate idea that Black women must always show up perfect, be emotionless while also likable, and center everyone else above herself is another aspect of white supremacist culture; it is *misogynoir*.

Demanding that Black folks, and Black women in particular, continue to work while we grieve is a remnant of the antebellum period, a period where the humanity of the enslaved was never considered, especially their heartache and pain. Black people were treated as less than animals and were always expected to keep on going regardless of what they may have been personally dealing with. For rest during the antebellum period, without permission, most certainly equaled a call for death. Rest, as Tricia Hersey instructs, is resistance.[14] And for the folks who need to hear this, we do not need the oppressors' permission to rest anymore!

In many ways, African Americans have also adopted the oppressors' mindset by clutching at this idea of *Black excellence!* Black brilliance is excellent and as much as we have tried to adopt it and make it fetch, it is akin to Washington's bootstraps ideology. Similar to the thinking of Washington, it demands that all who are born under the racialized category of Black must always show up in ways that do not demean or embarrass the culture. It is steeped in classism and considers itself to be a resistance call when in reality it's a call for assimilation—to be seen, to appear, to be revered as just-as-good-as-whiteness. If Black people believe that Blackness is separate and apart from the rules of

[12] Audre Lorde, *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (UK: Silver Press, 2017).
[13] Moya Bailey, "Guest Post: 'An Open Letter to Nelly.'" Black Youth Project, November 14, 2013, https://blackyouthproject.com/guest-post-an-open-letter-to-nelly/.
[14] Tricia Hersey, *Rest Is Resistance: A Manifesto* (New York: Little, Brown Spark, 2022).

engagement within whiteness, why do we demand that Blackness shows up as monolithic depictions of a suitable performance of palatable Blackness?

More pointedly, who is the performance for? Especially since Black people claim to not care what racist white folks think. I am just as excellent in my Blackness while wearing a durag, not in a suit, and smoking a blunt if I wish. For that is what it means to be in direct opposition of the roaring call of the oppressor. Higher education, as a practice and discipline of study, does not consider the expansiveness of Blackness and it does not know how to—or prefer to—make room for it. It forces us to concede our identities and overwork ourselves to remain. In many ways, the Black exceptionalism is reproduced through the generations from Black mentor to Black student, which only reaffirms that whiteness is still present without interruption. The idea of being *twice as good* permeating the soundwaves, a sound so specific that only we can hear it.

Perry helps us to understand the limitations of Black freedom in white spaces due to inherent surveillance, voyeurism, and the maintenance of inequality.[15] My take on this work is in application to higher education and academia and how its erasing of our identity morphs into a critique of your brilliance and ability to be seen as exceptional or excellent. The Breonna Taylor–George Floyd–Ahmaud Aubrey era of academia was supremely performative. It allowed for Black scholars whose work is deeply critical of higher education, the academy, and its practices to be briefly centered. This brief centering allowed for white folks in and around academia to create white guilt zones within our institutions and communities. For a brief moment in time, each of these organizations pretended to care about anti-Blackness and its impact on the lives of Black folks.

For a brief moment in time, Black scholars did not have to perform excellence via exceptionalism; it was just so. Within the past five years we have witnessed white people, institutions, and organizations perform atonement until they grew tired of it, and it became old. We are quickly racing backward into a time that precedes 2020, a time where stepping over Black bodies was allowed, and not seen as deleterious. A time where racialized dog-whistles could be said with the boldness of your next breath and there were no consequences. The impact of anti-Black racism will be felt everywhere, and most certainly within the halls of academia and higher education at large.

[15] Perry, *More Beautiful and More Terrible.*

The recent deaths of Black women in higher education and academia who, by all their merits earned, are considered exceptional and excellent, serve as reminders of how easily disposable Black folks are in this country. By all measures, the United States, academia, and higher education are each complicit in the harms caused by *performative diversity*.[16] Drs. Antoinette "Bonnie" Candia-Bailey, JoAnne A. Epps, and Orinthia T. Montague all died within the 2023–2024 academic year. Each of these deaths were completely unexpected; these women were not retired and the oldest of the three dying at the age of seventy-two. It would be easy to dismiss their deaths as random, except Dr. Candia-Bailey left a paper trail. Her paper trail showed a direct cause of her death and it being directly related to the stress of her job and her white male boss.

Learning that the memorial where President Epps collapsed continued on after her body was removed is further proof of the disregard of Black life. Black people are quite literally killing themselves because of workplaces that refuse to see our worth, even in death. In our burning desire to recapture our humanity and be seen as just-as-good while operating at *twice* the capacity, we forget that we are not superhuman. The stories of the eight participants in this study further reminded me that we should all be reminding ourselves to rest, resist, and disassociate from the idea of needing to work twice as hard.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY COUNTER-STORYTELLING

To best tell the story of the eight participants and their relationship with higher education, academia, and the notion of *twice as good*, I applied the lens of critical race theory. Critical race theory is a legal framework that helps us as critical scholars be able to ascertain the connection between race, racism, and any particular phenomenon. Critical race theory as a concept was birthed from critical legal studies (CLS). CLS was a noble concept for white liberal scholars and scholars of color to understand the way that discrimination determined outcomes within the law. Like most white liberals, CLS had its limitations, in that it refused to acknowledge race and did not choose to center the voices of those who often experienced discrimination. Matsuda

[16] Frederick Engram, *Black Liberation through Action and Resistance: MOVE* (Lanham: Hamilton Books, 2024); and "Why Are There Cops Here? How Anti-Blackness Increases Police Interactions on White College Campuses," *International Forum of Teaching and Studies* 19, no. 1 (2023): 13–24, https://www.americanscholarspress.us/journals/IFST/pdf/IFOTS-1-2023/IFOTSV19N1-Art2.pdf.

made a declarative statement regarding this problematic stance: she states that those who have had the direct experience with discrimination should speak and be heard.[17]

As simple as Matsuda's concept was, and as we know through the sordid history of African Americans in this nation, everyone believes that they have the right to speak for us—even the most well-intentioned of white liberals. The early legal thinkers of CRT, Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, Daniel Solorzano, and countless others, provide context for why the white voice was to take a backseat to the experiences and *counter-stories* of the impacted. White American scholars have long operated as the expert of the Black lived experience while simultaneously talking to none of us about it. It has often been accepted that non-Black folks are the truth-tellers of Blackness, and not only is it offensive and anti-Black, it is also false. Black people are the best auto-ethnographers of the Black lived experience, whether it be in concert with oppression, liberation, or celebration, to be clear.

Solorzano and Yosso, made the case that critical race theory helped with the advancement of a strategy to account for and foreground the ever-existing role of race and racism within education. The intent of this theoretical framework was to eliminate the subordination of people by race as well as gender, social class, sexual orientation, national origin, and language.[18] Prior to the work of Solorzano and Yosso, we had the blessed and courageous work of Ladson-Billings and Tate, who were the first education scholars to conceptualize CRT for education.[19] Their early and necessary work allowed for the work of several other K-12 and higher-education scholars like me. Patton highlights how the work of Ladson-Billings and Tate provided a platform to extend CRT into higher education.[20]

Dr. Lori Patton's work is pivotal to this very conversation because it was intentional in the disruption of *racelessness* within the context of higher educa-

[17] Mari Matsuda, "Looking to the Bottom: Critical Legal Studies and Reparations," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 22 (1977): 323–99, http://hdl.handle.net/10125/65944.
[18] Daniel Solorzano and Tara Yosso, "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (2002): 23–44, https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103.
[19] Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," *Teachers College Record* 97, no. 1 (1995): 47–67, https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819509700104.
[20] Lori Patton. 2015. "Disrupting Postsecondary Prose: Toward a Critical Race Theory of Higher Education," *Urban Education* 51, no. 3 (2015): 315–42, https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915602542.

tion discourse.[21] Patton, Higginbotham, Ladson-Billings and Tate, as well as my own work, are intentional about redirecting people to understanding the role of race and racism in our analysis of power, and in this context, within higher education. In order to appropriately understand the way that Black people and other folks of color are othered within higher education and academia, we must do so by first acknowledging the way that race and subsequently racism are weaponized within the everyday experience of non-white campus stakeholders. Critical race theory, although not the appropriate theory to be used to assess each and every nuanced dynamic that exists within higher education, is useful in its providing of core tenets like counter-storytelling to tell this particular story of being twice-as-good from the perspective of the historically othered.

In further understanding the dynamic nature of centering the voices of the oppressed in their own stories, it helps us realign our commitment to social justice. It also reinforces our need to constantly challenge dominant ideology as encouraged by the writing of Solorzano and Yosso.[22] Black people are the artists and curators of our own dynamic experiences, and we do ourselves a disservice when we forget this. When we allow for the dominant white voice, whom we know does not mean us well, to articulate our deferred dreams and deepest fears, we do so at our own peril. Our experiences in higher education and in academia are deeply vast and nuanced and there should be no minimization of these experiences to force us into a monolithic agreement. However, the truth in our lived experiences often intersect, like our multifaceted identities.

INTERSECTING PARABLES OF A SHARED EXPERIENCE

The eight participants highlighted in this piece are strangers to each other. None of the participants knows who the others are, where they work, or how they identify. This phenomenological qualitative research approach was intentional, as it allowed for each of the participants to feel safe in sharing their experiences without fear of retribution or retaliation. However, the participants each have intersecting identities that are shared. As an example, each of the participants has, at the bare minimum, attended a four-year college or university and earned a bachelor's degree. All of the participants identify and present as Black or African American. Below is a table that displays

[21] Ibid.

[22] Solorzano and Yosso, "Critical Race Methodology."

the pseudonyms of the eight participants, as well as their gender identity and stakeholder roles within higher education and academia.

TABLE 1. Eight is Enough! The Participants

Pseudonym	Stakeholder role	Gender identity
Xavier	Lecturer	Male
Ruby	Doctoral student	Female
Devan	Associate Professor	Female
Malcolm	Doctoral student	Male
Bruce Wayne	Part-time faculty	Male
E. Brady	Assistant Professor/Assistant Director	Female
Elle	Sr. Assoc. Director of Alumni Engagement	Female
Christopher	Consultant/part-time faculty	Male

In addition to these *intersecting identities*, a term that extends upon Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw's *intersectionality*,[23] allowing for the shared marginalized identities not solely exclusive to Black women and femmes to be reconceptualized as a coalition between men and women across racialized and gendered categories. Like many African Americans who grew up within the United States and have never met before, there are certain teachings that were passed from generation to generation. We are all familiar with what it means to be Black within the context of the American social experiment and we all know how it feels to be targeted and othered. Especially within higher education, an experience that all eight of the participants eagerly resonated with.

XAVIER

Xavier is a recent doctoral graduate who serves as both a practitioner of higher education in his role as Director of Career Services, as well as a lecturer in the department of sociology. When asked the question regarding working twice as hard, Xavier immediately related to the parable as something that was taught to him by his parents. He indicated that the conversation was not intended to "demean" him but to inform him that as a Black person in

[23] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99, https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039.

America, he would have to "do more." He specifically cites that this teaching is directly related to institutional and systemic anti-Black racism that is pervasive within the American context. He states: "I was taught that had to be better than folks, specifically white folks."

DEVAN

Devan serves in the role of Associate Professor at her hometown HBCU. She began her career and earned tenure at a midwestern PWI. Devan begins with highlighting that a great deal of her understanding of "twice as hard" connects to her southern upbringing in Alabama. She states that her relationship to the parable was different because growing up in her majority-Black hometown, people were affirmed by their community. They were taught to be "Black and proud!" However, because of the history of African Americans in this country, it was instilled that you would indeed need to work hard. She states: "My mother informed me that the world would not reflect the same as my hometown," which was a statement that Devan indicates feeling confused by until she left for college at 17 to attend the University of Alabama.

Devan talks of being in college during the beating of Rodney King and then the trial of O. J. Simpson. She also discussed seeing the Confederate flags proudly represented on campus as she walked to and from class. Her professor asked her one day: "Wouldn't you feel more comfortable sitting in the back of the class?" Devan states the two other Black students in her class had already made themselves comfortable in the back, which left her conflicted. Devan called her mom, who reminded her, "The world does not look like Tuskegee." It was then when her mother stated that she would just need to work harder.

CHRISTOPHER

Christopher works as a part-time faculty member and a consultant. Christopher talks about his identity as Indigenous not being considered because of the preconceived notions of what the aesthetic of a member of a Native Nation should be. In terms of his understanding of the parable "twice as hard," he mentions the "Black tax," particularly around working twice as hard to only receive half as much. He further goes on to discuss how the parable reinforces the idea that we must submit to being overworked and under-recognized. Christopher offered his own experience in reference to his work

being significantly better than his white colleagues. He believes reimagining this parable allows for him to consider how his hard work sets the stage to make it easier for those "who come after."

ELLE

Elle works as a Senior Associate Director of Alumni Engagement at an Ivy League institution. When asked about the parable of working twice as hard, Elle offered an interesting response: "When you say this, I think about being a Black person and working twice as hard means that you constantly have on more than one hat." Wearing multiple hats indicates that the expectation is that you carry on multiple tasks, and at most times simultaneously in an attempt to prove that you can keep up and that you belong. She also mentioned doing the role that you were hired for but then all of the other "hidden curriculum" that many Black folks who serve as practitioners or as faculty have become accustomed to. "Hidden curriculum" is a simplified way to describe how the goalposts are often moved for people of color and women. How expectations are placed upon you, and you are expected to master them, but no one gives you the exact list of things that you are responsible for knowing.

MALCOLM

Malcolm is a first-year doctoral student at a university located in a northeastern city. Malcolm is active within several higher-education professional organizations and was an undergraduate at Mizzou shortly after the Concerned Student 1950 era (2015–2016). When asked about the twice-as-hard parable, Malcolm briefly paused to collect his thoughts, then he stated: "Being a Black person, a marginalized folk in this country, you are always doing more than everybody else." Malcom goes on to say that "the labor arrangements for marginalized folk are not valued. Which makes you have to overwork yourself to receive a margin of the credit deserved."

RUBY

Ruby is currently a second-year doctoral student at a university in the southwestern portion of the United States. When I asked Ruby about the parable "twice as hard," she offered a pretty lengthy response. Ruby posited: "It means that you are coming in early and staying later. You are doing your best to dot your i's and cross your t's and not take any days off." What Ruby

describes in her response is the culture of not resting in order to prove your worth, which directly conflicts with Hersey's stance on rest as resistance.[24] Ruby also states: "It means jumping at every opportunity and unfortunately burning out as a result."

BRUCE WAYNE

Bruce Wayne is a recent doctoral graduate, K-12 administrator, and part-time faculty member at two separate universities. Bruce Wayne had an interesting response to the twice-as-hard parable. Bruce Wayne takes the approach that "In order for me to advance in my career I have to be better, I have to be more organized." He acknowledges that this means that he has to double the work of his counterparts: "As an example, if their goal is to grow their [professional] network by 5 percent, then I need to grow my network by a minimum of 10 percent." Bruce Wayne indicates that he was raised with this mindset—taught to him since as early as he could recall. Referencing his private-school upbringing, he says: "As someone who is in white spaces, I'm going to always have to work twice as hard to get half as far."

E. BRADY

E. Brady serves in the role as Assistant Director of Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging and is a faculty member in two programs. She teaches in a physician associate studies program and a public health doctoral program. I appreciated E. Brady's direct response when asked about the parable "twice as hard." She, in a very matter-of-fact way stated: "It sucks!" She then went on to further explain what she meant: "It means working twice as hard to only receive half of the acknowledgement." She explains what she dislikes the most about this expectation: "My administrators think that is a normal pace for me, and it's not, and it is exhausting." E. Brady mentions being intentional about prioritizing asking for breaks so that she can have an opportunity to reset her mental health and rest.

Each of these participants are on their own journey in their campus stakeholder role. Whether they are doctoral students, part-time faculty, practitioners, tenure-track, or tenured faculty, each of them has an intersecting relationship with the parable "twice as hard." One of the eight participants (Bruce Wayne) indicated that the requirement to be exceptional at all times

[24] Hersey, *Rest Is Resistance.*

is something that he was accustomed to, so he did not particularly look at it in ways that are harmful—simply expected. The other seven participants, on the other hand, were very clear that although they were aware via their upbringing or were introduced to the concept by white people (undergrad professors), they were not fans of it. The intersection of each of these participant experiences highlights the fact that the American Black lived experience, regardless of where it takes place, is intertwined or commingled.

REJECT WHITE EXPECTATIONS AND DEMANDS

This study for me provided affirmation for a perspective that I personally live my life by: Black people all need to renegotiate our relationships with white supremacy. In doing so, it forces us to re-evaluate our own journeys to and through anti-Blackness and participatory engagements in othering. We have no say-so over how white people perceive or respond to us, and that should never be our labor. Instead, what we should be teaching our children, our students, our colleagues, and ourselves is that the focus should be to do good work but not more than is required.

When Black people place unrealistic demands upon ourselves it brings about unnecessary health-related (physical and mental) challenges, causing many of us to leave this world before we otherwise would.[25] African Americans bring far more to this world than our suffering and forced subjugation. The way for Black people to see ourselves through that is by first learning that the "twice as hard" parable is absolutely a problem and we must unlearn it. Nothing good has ever come from proving to white people how good we are, and central to this belief is that ideology ("twice as hard") is deadly, whether you admit it to yourself or not.

One of the things that I teach my doctoral students, particularly my Black students, is to stop performing for whiteness. The academy and higher education at large are places of high stress for Black folks, and as such cause us to perform as caricatures of ourselves, shrink ourselves, and believe that only one of us can or should occupy any given space at one time. Releasing ourselves from this performance and the ideology of needing to be twice as good allows us to focus first on ourselves in connection to these historical sites of

[25] Sidney H. Hankerson et al., "The Intergenerational Impact of Structural Racism and Cumulative Trauma on Depression," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 179, no. 6 (2022): 434–40. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.21101000.

anti-Black oppression, and second the work that we are capable of producing. This is the parable that we should be adopting and passing through the generations, not the parables that continue to hold us in bondage, especially when we are, in most cases, better.

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The Symbolic Annihilation of Black Working-Class Women in *The Black Family* (aka *Good Times*)

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Good Times (CBS, 1974-1979), a television situation comedy about an urban African American working-class nuclear family, started as the idea of two African American men, Mike Evans and Eric Monte. Presented to white executive producer, Norman Lear in the fall of 1971, Monte's pilot teleplay "Who's Got the Rent?" for a series he titled *The Black Family* introduced James and Mattie Black, their children Junior, Thelma, and Michael, and their friend Willona. A textual analysis of Monte's teleplay reveals the symbolic annihilation—condemnation, trivialization, and victimization—of the Black working-class mother, Mattie, and daughter, Thelma. Though they shared condemnation and trivialization with mothers and daughters in white-cast sitcoms of the fifties and sixties, victimization through violence in Monte's teleplay distinguishes Mattie and Thelma from them. I review Monte's background and the work of the Black Women's Community Development Foundation to understand how the issue of violence against Black women resonated among them. This analysis of the fictional symbolic annihilation of Mattie and Thelma Black reflects the marginalization of Black women in American primetime television as well as may serve as an indicator of the marginalized status of Black women in American society. This paper advances understandings of Black working-class women's intersectional identities in seventies primetime television portrayals, reveals the culpability of Black men writers in creating those depictions, acknowledges the challenges of Black men staff writers, and contextualizes a popular artifact within the discourses of grassroots Black women's advocacy.

KEYWORDS: Symbolic Annihilation, Black Women, *Good Times*, Eric Monte, Television

INTRODUCTION

Good Times (CBS, 1974-1979), a television situation comedy about an urban African American working-class nuclear family, started as an idea in the fall of 1971 by two African American men, Mike Evans, who played Lionel Jefferson in the situation comedy *All in the Family* (CBS, 1971-1979), and his new acquaintance, Eric Monte.[1] The plan for the series congealed through a collaboration between Monte, white executive producer, Norman Lear, and white producer, Allan Manings. Central to their meetings was a pilot teleplay written by Monte and that would eventually cast the Black woman actor, Esther Rolle, as its star.[2] Rolle became the focal point of a new Tandem Productions series by Lear's production company because she was enjoying success playing Florida Evans, the Black female domestic who worked for the Findlay family in another Tandem sitcom *Maude* (CBS, 1972-1978).

Responsible for writing the teleplay, or script, that Lear reviewed in 1971, Monte named his series (and the family he envisioned), *The Black Family*.[3] "Who's Got the Rent?" (changed by 1973 to "Getting Up the Rent" for the series *Good Times*) introduces husband and father, James Black, wife and mother, Mattie Black, their children, James Jr., or Junior, Thelma, and Michael, and Mattie's friend, Willona. Lear and Tandem Productions' plans for developing a weekly primetime television series around the preexisting African American woman character in *Maude* included changing in Monte's draft the family's surname to "Evans" from "Black" and the wife and mother's name to "Florida" from "Mattie."

Without a model for a Black nuclear family sitcom, the closest examples of nuclear families in television were white, patriarchal, middle-class, suburban, and occupationally defined sitcoms such as *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (ABC, 1952-1966), *Leave It to Beaver* (CBS, 1957-1958, ABC, 1958-1963), *Father Knows Best* (CBS, 1954-1955, NBC, 1955-1958, CBS, 1959-1960), and *The Donna Reed Show* (ABC, 1958-1966). Monte and Evans's premise—an Af-

[1] "Good Times," *E! The True Hollywood Story*," season 4, episode 31, E! Entertainment Network, 20 August 2000, DailyMotion, https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7aop9r.
[2] "#0101 Getting Up the Rent" (*Good Times*, TV Scripts Box 163, Folder 5, Ray and Pat Browne Popular Culture Library, Jerome Library, Bowling Green State University, n.d.); Norman Lear, *Even* This *I Get to Experience*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2014), 268; Ronald E. Kisner, "New Comedy Brings Good Times to TV," *Jet* (23 May 1974): 59; Louie Robinson, "Bad Times on the 'Good Times' Set," *Ebony* 30, no. 11 (Sept. 1975): 34.
[3] "#0101 Getting Up the Rent."

rican American family consisting of a husband, wife, and children—broke new ground for the "gateway" family that the Evanses in *Good Times* would become. It also blazed a trail for gateway depictions of Black women. Symbolic annihilation, or acts of condemnation and trivialization, and traditional gender roles connected the Black working-class mother, Mattie and Black working-class daughter, Thelma in Monte's teleplay to the earlier, white-cast sitcom mothers and daughters. Unfortunately, symbolic annihilation through acts of victimization further distinguished their portrayals.[4]

Symbolic annihilation was a concept that communications scholar George Gerbner mentioned briefly in his 1972 research report, "Violence in Television Drama." When noting that "representation in the fictional world" symbolizes or "signifies social existence," Gerbner asserted that condemnation, trivialization, or "absence means symbolic annihilation."[5] Sociologist Gaye Tuchman applied the concept to her 1978 introductory discussion of the possible impact of mass media sex-role stereotypes upon national life, and in particular, the impact of sex-role stereotypes on the depiction of women in television, the women's pages of newspapers, and women's magazines.[6] She further noted that the victimization of women qualified as symbolic annihilation. This paper describes the absence of edifying and agentive relationships between Black women and Black men in Eric Monte's pilot teleplay. Black women are not absent from Monte's pilot (in fact the cast is quite balanced with three women and three men). Rather, the treatment of two of the Black women, one an adult and the other a teenager, is of particular interest here.

The victimization of Mattie and Thelma through violence, in addition to their trivialization and condemnation, is noteworthy because public and political attention to violence against women and girls surfaced distinctly in the 1960s and 1970s, precisely at the time of Monte's completed teleplay.

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[4] For discussions of symbolic annihilation in marketing, see Lauren Gurrieri, "Patriarchal Marketing and the Symbolic Annihilation of Women," *Journal of Marketing Management*, 37, nos. 3-4, (2021): 364-370, https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1826179; and for discussions of the symbolic annihilation of race, see Robin Means Coleman and Emily Chivers Yochim, "The Symbolic Annihilation of Race: A Review of the 'Blackness' Literature," *African American Research Perspectives*, 12 (2008): 1-10, https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/60140.

[5] George Gerbner, "Violence in Television Drama: Trends and Symbolic Functions," in *Television and Social Behavior*, Vol. 1, Content and control, ed. George A. Comstock and Eli A. Rubinstein, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 44.

[6] Gaye Tuchman, "Introduction: The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media," in *Hearth and Home: The Images of Women in the Mass Media*, ed. Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benét, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978): 3-38.

While his work does not provide an understanding of the nature, causes, and consequences of such violence, it does show that he made it a reality for the fictional Mattie and Thelma, which then suggests that it was a reality he may have known as well. I review Monte's background and the discourse of Black women's advocacy to map their potential convergence—and divergence—regarding violence against Black women. The focus of this paper is to detail the ways in which Monte symbolically annihilated Mattie and Thelma and to contextualize these depictions within Monte's life and the discourse of the Black Women's Community Development Foundation. What follows next is a brief summary of Monte's story to help us visualize this new pathbreaking family-protagonist.

"WHO'S GOT THE RENT?" TELEPLAY SUMMARY

Monte's teleplay—that includes two acts, two scenes in the second act, and a tag at the end—opens with Mattie, Thelma, Junior, and Michael sitting around the dining room table eating breakfast. Typical sibling squabbling occurs as Mattie repeatedly reminds the children that they need to finish eating and leave for school. James joins them a little later after having been out "all night." His appearance also introduces the plot problem which is that the family lacks that month's rent money. After verbal exchanges between James, Mattie, and their children, Thelma, Junior, and Michael go to school, Willona enters the apartment to visit with Mattie, and James leaves to meet up with his friend Sylvester to "hustle pool."

Three avenues for raising the rent money unfold, two of which employed the informal methods of "hustle economics" were successful.[7] Although Mattie and James argue over his "pool hustling" to raise money for the rent, James finds a "game" and wins enough money to pay it. Junior's unidentified hustling activity that involves "stealing" also results in enough money to pay the rent. The unsuccessful attempt—and the only one following a formal and bureaucratic, but legal route—was by Mattie. Upon Willona's suggestion, Mattie agrees to apply for "welfare assistance." In the end, Mattie left the welfare "emergency center" with "forms to fill out" but no rent money.

[7] Adrien Sebro, *Scratchin' and Survivin': Hustle Economics and the Black Sitcoms of Tandem Productions* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2023): 11.

MATTIE BLACK

Mattie Black is a stay-at-home wife and mother. Monte's script shares little about her or her background except for when she and James discuss their first apartment in a "tenement building" with the "bathroom in the hall" and their lack of income so grave that they needed a "bag of beans to last a week."[8] Mattie and James's discussion of their first apartment, the year he had eighteen jobs, and when James gave up "pool hustling" was the only time they expressed outward care and affection towards each other.

Although a hardworking husband and father, James trivialized and victimized Mattie. In two scenes in Monte's teleplay, James intimidates and threatens physical aggression towards Mattie, demanding that she acquiesces to him as husband and father in the home. The first mention of potential physical harm towards Mattie occurs in James's comments to the children about their mother's disrespect towards him:

> JAMES: Junior, if you say one more word, I'm gon' tie a knot in your tongue.
>
> MATTIE: James, don't fuss at him, I got....
>
> JAMES: Mattie, a wife shouldn't argue with her husband in front of the kids. One: it makes the kids confused to see the two most important people in they lives [arguing]. Two: it causes them to lose respect for the father image and; Three: she might get smacked in the mouth.[9]

James verbally hinted at physical aggression towards Mattie while not carrying out a direct act of physical aggression. Mattie was not attacked, but the threat still loomed large. Another time that James threatens violence against Mattie is over the rent money. James wins enough money from playing pool to cover the rent. He and his friend, Sylvester, return to the apartment to leave the money for Mattie while she and Willona are gone at the welfare office. James puts the money in Mattie's purse, writes and places a note on the dining room table, and leaves the apartment. Junior then returns home to find the movers in the apartment packing their belongings to begin the

[8] "Who's Got the Rent?," 12B.
[9] "Who's Got the Rent?," 9.

eviction process. Junior gives the movers the rent money he raised and uses James's note for a receipt, which he then places in his pocket.

Junior, Thelma, and Michael have all returned home from school. Mattie comes home to find money in her purse. Astonished, Mattie thinks that someone wrongfully placed the money in it. She writes a note and addresses an envelope to the police department and directs Michael to take the letter to the mailbox. Returning home, James is livid when he realizes that Mattie has mailed the money to the police: "Mattie, you too old to be believing in Santa Claus."[10] Speaking to Mattie as if she were a child, thus trivializing her, James dismisses and puts her down. James casts Mattie as a naive child because after all, only children believe in Santa Claus.

Realizing that Mattie mailed the rent money to the police ("don't tell me you gave our money away"), the stage direction notes that James "advanced on her." At that point, Thelma "jumped between" James and Mattie.[11] After commanding Thelma to sit down, Junior grabs his father telling him: "wait a minute, man." James decides that he will go to the police department to retrieve the money: "and when I get back, we gon have a long talk on what those Jehova Witnesses been telling you."[12] Here is the clearest example of James intending to inflict physical harm on Mattie, but she does not fight back, argue, cry, or yell. She is silent in response to what is happening to her. No explanation for this response is described in the teleplay. Thelma and Junior did more to protect Mattie than she did for herself.

Monte used the comment about the Jehovah's Witnesses for comic effect. James's condescending comment reveals one of their distinguishing characteristics. Founded in the late nineteenth-century, the Jehovah's Witnesses are a United States Protestant Christian denomination and the butts of cultural jokes because of their door-to-door evangelism and proselytism.[13] James's potential wariness of all religion could have provoked his response, perhaps with good reason. A primary criticism of African Americans' attachment to Christianity is their willingness to engage with and trust in messages

[10] "Who's Got the Rent?," 38.
[11] "Who's Got the Rent?," 38.
[12] "Who's Got the Rent?," 39.
[13] Michael Lipka, "A Closer Look at Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States," Pew Research Center, April 26, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/04/26/a-closer-look-at-jehovahs-witnesses-living-in-the-u-s/#:~:text=Jehovah's%20Witnesses%20are%20among%20the,another%20race%20or%20mixed%20race.

encouraging "compensatory" rewards in the "sweet by and by" for the hardships and struggles they experience in the "nasty here and now." A future compensation does little for distressed urban African Americans such as the Evanses. Since religion is a "hustle," in James's mind, Mattie and other believers are gullible for believing in God. After all, Mattie's gullibility caused her to make a nonsensical decision to mail money to the police!

Sociologist, Patricia Hill Collins, argues that Eurocentric ideologies of Black masculinity and Black femininity—particularly ideas advanced by the traditional family ideal—and intersecting oppressions of race, gender, class, and sexuality provide a backdrop for Black heterosexual love relationships.[14] In Mattie's love relationship with James, she may have perceived his threatening and abusive interactions with her as routine and that she and Thelma were not victims. Although Monte did not present Mattie as a "superstrong" Black woman—she never spoke up for herself, demonstrated self-reliance, or expressed authority over their children, her silence towards James's attempt to hit her was likely *because* of the "superstrong" Black woman myth. Because Black women are expected to be self-reliant and independent, then Mattie may have felt that she should be able to handle the violence on her own, which could encourage denying the seriousness of her situation. Mattie subordinated her needs to James's needs. Mattie's silence and passivity allowed James to control *her* physically and emotionally and to retain *his* manhood. Racism and powerlessness further exacerbate the violence surrounding Mattie establishing it as simply a relational standard within her home and community.[15]

THELMA BLACK

A junior in high school, Thelma Black is the only daughter of Mattie and James Black. Men within and outside of Thelma's home trivialize, condemn, and victimize her. Junior is the main family member who condemns and trivializes Thelma. Putdowns relate to Thelma's face, hair and makeup, and mental capacity. Calling Thelma "ugly" is used for comic effect but it does not negate the long history of white American society's reference to Black women being "ugly" as compared to "beautiful" white women. At the same time, Thelma does her share of trivializing Junior's painting abilities and

[14] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 165, 171.
[15] Ibid., 171-72.

educational status—he spent "three semesters a sophomore." On the other hand, all the men in the home—James, Junior, and Michael—criticize Thelma's cooking. Monte tapped into a major thematic artery of nuclear family sitcoms. Cooking is of importance for nuclear family sitcom mothers, as well as their daughters. White-cast nuclear family sitcoms of the fifties and sixties highlighted the wife's domesticity including childcare, cooking, and cleaning. While sons were more actively involved with domestic tasks than their fathers, daughters such as Thelma, Betty Anderson in *Father Knows Best*, and Mary Stone in *The Donna Reed Show*, helped with domestic duties and preparing meals as expected.[16] Likewise in *Good Times*, J.J. and Michael contributed to domestic tasks to a greater extent than James but Thelma was expected to help.

Monte devotes roughly three pages of dialogue to Thelma's cooking. Michael's opinion plays on the theme of Black Power which his character espouses often: "Mama, JUNIOR's right. When I said Black was beautiful, I wasn't talking about oatmeal."[17] A lengthy exchange between James, Junior, and Thelma illustrates the condemning comments they freely share:

> JAMES (TO THELMA): Get me something to eat; I had a hard night. (THELMA GETS IT AND HE LOOKS AT IT) What the hell is this?
>
> JUNIOR: Charcoal broiled poison.
>
> THELMA: Oatmeal.
>
> JAMES: MATTIE why you let THELMA do this to the little food we got.
>
> THELMA: How I'm gon learn to cook if I don't practice?
>
> JAMES: I don't know; but there's got to be a way that's easier on my stomach.
>
> JUNIOR: Does that mean we don't have to eat it?

[16] Mary R. Desjardins, *Father Knows Best* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 78-79; Nina C. Leibman, *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 221, 233; Joanne Morreale, *The Donna Reed Show* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), 78-84.

[17] "Who's Got the Rent?," 3.

> JAMES: No, we ain't throwing no food away in this house, I don't care what THELMA does to it.[18]

Thelma did not live up to the domestic standards of cooking, and so the men in her home condemn her. At the same time, they offer no help presumably because cooking is "women's work." While Thelma defends herself pointing out the need to "practice" cooking, Mattie never backs her. Rather than support Thelma, she changes the subject—the children will be late if they do not finish their breakfast, her nerves cannot handle the commotion, and they cannot throw out food because of its exorbitant costs.[19]

In another scene in Monte's teleplay, Thelma faces the intimation and threat of physical aggression coupled with a demand that she acquiesces to male dominance. Returning home from school, four young Black men are in the hallway near her apartment singing as if in a doo-wop group. Larry leaves the group to "rap," or engage in romantic talk, with Thelma.[20]

> LARRY: ... I got to rap to Thelma for a minute.
>
> THELMA: About what?
>
> LARRY: About us getting together.
>
> THELMA: I wouldn't get together with you if we was siamese twins.
>
> LARRY: Don't get smart with me.
>
> THELMA: I'm getting smart all by myself cause you can't keep up.[21]

As their interaction continues, Thelma's insults and disinterest in Larry angers him. Grabbing her, he says: "You better watch your mouth." Thelma calls out to Junior for help. As Larry's friends pull him off Thelma, they tell him to "cool it." Larry tells them that he will "lay that broad out."[22] Junior appears but does not fight these young men. One of Larry's friends discourages the fight because he and Junior are "tight," which in Black language means they know each other well and have a good relationship. Afterwards, back in the apartment, Junior scolds Thelma telling her that she "better

[18] "Who's Got the Rent?," 6.
[19] "Who's Got the Rent?," 3.
[20] Thomas Kochman, *Black and White Styles in Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 76.
[21] "Who's Got the Rent?," 25.
[22] "Who's Got the Rent?," 25.

learn to quit fat mouthing people."[23] Junior was telling Thelma to know "her place." Unfortunately, Thelma's home in a housing project includes the potential for harm from her male neighbors.

Eurocentric ideologies of Black masculinity and Black femininity and intersecting oppressions of race, gender, class, and sexuality affected Thelma as well.[24] Observing her parents' relationship, experiencing the young Black men in her housing project, and "knowing her place" may well set Thelma up to mirror her mother's life, behaviors, and emotional posture. On the other hand, Monte revealed glimmers of hope for Thelma's relational future and self-definition. For one, Thelma did not accept Larry's treatment of her—she called out to Junior for help. There is hope because of Thelma's response to her father James when he "advanced on" her mother Mattie. Thelma stood between them to defend her mother. Thelma was not complicit with a "conspiracy of silence" and passivity the same way her mother is—a conspiracy that in fact plagues both African American women and men. Thelma is on her journey to *not* accept violence as a relational standard. Thelma's actions are pregnant with the potential that she will not embrace self-reliance and independence as a defense covering truth and enabling violence against her, will not handle violence on her own, and will not subordinate her needs to her husband's or partner's needs.[25]

ERIC MONTE

Ironically, but not surprisingly, symbolic annihilation, particularly acts of trivialization, best described Monte's own position within the expanding American television industry as he struggled with Lear and Manings to present his vision of authentic Black culture, even as he symbolically annihilated the Black working-class mother, Mattie, and daughter, Thelma. The verbal threat and intimation of physical aggression towards Mattie and Thelma existed clearly in Monte's script and may serve as a sign of how systematic and widespread violence was against Black working-class women in urban cities such as Chicago.

Monte grew up in the Cabrini-Green Housing Project in Chicago and enjoyed his childhood describing it as "one of the best childhoods imaginable

[23] "Who's Got the Rent?," 25B.
[24] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* 165, 171
[25] Collins, 170, 172.

in the history of the species." Monte's parents divorced when he was "seven or eight years old." His "wonderful mother, who worked three jobs—two full-time jobs and one part-time job," entered a relationship with a Black male steel factory worker when Monte was twelve. Monte considered him to be like a "stepfather." The middle child between two sisters, Monte gives no sign as to whether his mother or sisters were abused by his father, mother's partner, men relatives, or neighbors.[26] Nevertheless, Monte either saw violence against Black women and girls in Cabrini-Green or took his inspiration from television and film.

Chicago in the late sixties and seventies was plagued by racial segregation just as the South. In January 1966, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) drafted a proposal known as the "Chicago Plan" for the development of a nonviolent action movement in the greater Chicago area. They believed that Black Americans were economically exploited and that the actual existence—and metaphor—of the "slum" best encapsulated the most pressing aspects of the lives of African Americans.[27] In their description of the "dynamics of the slum," the SCLC in conjunction with the Chicago-based Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCO) noted education, building trades unions, real estate, banks and mortgage companies, slum landlords, the welfare system, federal housing agencies, the courts, the police, the political system, the city administration, and the federal government. The plan does not specifically highlight the relationships between Black women and Black men but one could quickly discern that the general oppressive environment stoked problems among and within relationships of all types.

Hitchhiking his way to Hollywood, Monte eventually settled there and through his crucial connection to Mike Evans, sold his teleplay to Tandem Productions which later became the foundation for the episode, "Getting Up the Rent."[28] Relinquishing final authorial rights was typical for writers-for-hire and staff writers such as Monte. The industry's centralized brokerage

[26] "Eric Monte-The Unseen Interview (2006)," Reelblack Two, June 20, 2022, video, 57:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lC8tZ4l3O1Q&t=266s.

[27] Claybourne Carson, David J. Garrow, Gerald Gill, Vincent Harding, and Darlene Clark Hine, general editors. *The Eyes on the Prize: Civil Rights Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 294-296.

[28] "Eric Monte-The Unseen Interview (2006)," Reelblack Two, June 20, 2022, video, 57:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lC8tZ4l3O1Q&t=266s.

administration system demanded it.[29] For example, involved in the first six revisions of his teleplay, the primary script developers after Monte included Allan Manings and Norman Lear in the final six revisions.[30] Considering Monte's pilot teleplay to be a "very strong germ of an idea," Manings was brought in to revise it in the fall of 1973. Lear's direct involvement with script revisions appeared with his "polish" dated December 16, 1973, and in the "as broadcast" script dated January 4, 1974.

Dialogue in Monte's script changed significantly from the initial idea he presented to Norman Lear in 1971.[31] Changes also revolved around plot complications, settings, characters, and narrative. One example centers Mattie's resistance to James "hustling pool" to raise the rent money. James's response, which was the scene that related to him playing pool, touched upon the awareness of and expression of male dominance.

> MATTIE: I thought you had given up pool.
>
> JAMES: I thought I had too till I got that pink slip and that eviction notice, then I said "Look like you a pool hustler again."
>
> MATTIE: I don't want no pool hustler living in my house.
>
> JAMES: Your house? You been watching too much TV[.] This is my house; I pay the rent here.[32]

Lear's "polished" draft of the same scene mitigated the domination of James over Florida by reducing his male supremacist leanings and expanding Florida's dominance. Humor is introduced and religion is raised as a reason for James to not shoot pool.

> FLORIDA: James, I don't want you hustling no pool. You promised. (JAMES TAKES OUT AN OLD POOL CUE CASE; BLOWS THE DUST OFF IT)

[29] Paul DiMaggio, "Market Structure, the Creative Process, and Popular Culture: Toward an Organizational Reinterpretation of Mass-Culture Theory," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 11, no. 2, (Fall 1977): 443-444.
[30] "#0101 Getting Up the Rent."
[31] "Getting Up the Rent," (*Good Times*, TV Scripts Box 163, Folder 10-13, Ray and Pat Browne Popular Culture Library, Jerome Library, Bowling Green State University, n.d.).
[32] "Who's Got the Rent?," 7.

> JAMES: I also promised to take care of my family. Now, if anybody here knows another way I can raise the rent by five o'clock, I'll lay this up.
>
> ...
>
> FLORIDA: James!! The Lord don't want you hustlin' no pool.
>
> JAMES: Yeah, well, I'm gonna have to work out an understanding with the Lord some other time, Florida. Now, move. (JAMES PICKS FLORIDA UP AND KISSES HER QUICKLY. EXITS WITH HIS POOL CUE)
>
> FLORIDA: Damn, that man always could move me. Willona, don't all the magazines say that our women are supposed to be head of the house?
>
> WILLONA: They sure do.
>
> FLORIDA: Well, somebody oughta tell James.[33]

What was most vexing for Monte was Lear's resistance to his vision for presenting Black culture in the new series. This issue complicated his working relationship with Lear and Manings. For a time, the most significant sticking point in the revision of Monte's teleplay concerned the inclusion of the father. Monte asserts that he received "one note" at every meeting about his script telling him that he had to "get rid of the father because a strong Black man is not funny in a sitcom."[34] The strong Black father, James Evans, remained in the series but Monte fought to keep him there.

In addition to insisting that certain characters be in this new Black nuclear family sitcom, Monte used Black language, especially in the dialogue of the Black men, and included realistic scenes from the projects. For example, before Thelma's conflict with Larry, Monte set up the scene with Larry and three other young Black men in the hallway singing and drinking wine. Manings cut the scene in his first revision of Monte's teleplay.[35] Important to Monte, Black language using such grammatical forms as the negative concord ("ain't no don't find them"), *be* for habituation ("before you be late"), and

[33] "Getting Up the Rent," 22.
[34] *E! The True Hollywood Story*."
[35] "Getting Up the Rent" (*Good Times*, TV Scripts Box 163, Folder 7, Ray and Pat Browne Popular Culture Library, Jerome Library, Bowling Green State University, n.d.).

words ("scratch" for "money" and the "man" for the "police") is prominent throughout.[36] It is evident in Junior's dialogue with his mother Mattie:

> MATTIE: I don't see how you two can always be quoting out the Bible when an act of Congress couldn't get either of you in church.
>
> JUNIOR: I don *scoped* out the error of my ways.
>
> MATTIE: When you say that, it means you found a hole in one of your schemes.
>
> JUNIOR: I mean I finally checked out what you was *rapping* about and I *dig* it. I agree *one hundred* with you sending that *scratch* to the *man* (emphasis mine).[37]

On the positive side, Lear (and Manings) removed most of the symbolically annihilating acts against the women from Monte's provisional script. The victimization of Mattie and Thelma, or references to physical harm, was removed entirely. On the negative side, they dialed back the use of Black language. The passage quoted above was deleted. Also, later in the revisioning process, Monte inserted two scenes that highlighted Black characters other than the family and the movers. One involved a Black woman named Melody who worked in the housing project office and the other included a Black man as a womanizer-hustler in the welfare office when Mattie went there to receive help with the rent.[38] The less than uplifting figure of African American culture—the hustler—remained in the as-broadcast version to make the episode funny: "Hey there, foxy mama. Come to pick up some of that long green, huh?" It would have been intriguing to witness the potentially dynamic interactions between Mattie and Melody, a Black working class or Black middle class woman and employee for an office that is oppressive at its worse and ambivalent at best regarding its Black residents. What were Melody's challenges working in such as white-controlled and Black-dependent public services environment? Would Melody value Black solidarity or would she

[36] "Who's Got the Rent?" (*Good Times*, TV Scripts Box 163, Folder 1, Ray and Pat Browne Popular Culture Library, Jerome Library, Bowling Green State University, n.d.), 4,7,36.
[37] "Who's Got the Rent?," 36.
[38] "Getting Up the Rent" (*Good Times*, TV Scripts Box 163, Folder 5, Ray and Pat Browne Popular Culture Library, Jerome Library, Bowling Green State University, n.d.); "Getting Up the Rent" (*Good Times*, TV Scripts Box 163, Folder 8, Ray and Pat Browne Popular Culture Library, Jerome Library, Bowling Green State University, n.d.).

perpetuate working-class Black women's subordination?[39] Unfortunately, we will never know.

GRASSROOTS BLACK WOMEN'S ADVOCACY IN THE 1970S

Violence against women in the United States gained recognition as a social problem in the sixties and seventies.[40] Grassroots African American women's advocacy discourse such as that disseminated by the Black Women's Community Development Foundation, however, did not match the clarity in Monte's treatment of Black women. The Black Women's Community Development Foundation (BWCDF) created in 1968 in Washington, D.C., was largely funded by grant awards from the Irwin Sweeney Miller Foundation located in Columbus, Indiana. From 1969 to 1972, the BWCDF received $632,750 in grants,[41] $624,250 of which was awarded by the Irwin Sweeney Miller Foundation with the remaining funding from the Abelard Foundation, Carol Buttenweiser Loeb Foundation, and the Joyce and John Gutfreund Foundation. Irwin Sweeney Miller's first awards in 1970 were to support the BWCDF's Black Child Development Institute ($7,000) and general operating expenses ($226,250). Its third award in 1971 was an astonishing $390,750.

The grassroots group commissioned a study of "militant' Black women in 1970 that was published in 1972, organized three symposia in 1972 and 1974, and produced an annual report in 1973 that coincided with the timeline of Monte's conception of the first Black televisual nuclear family through to its first six weeks on air. The study, published as *"Together" Black Women*, involved in-depth interviews with "militant" Black women to determine their "thinking on a variety of matters as well as to gain some insight into their interests and activities as they relate to the current Black struggle."[42] The women discussed the liberation movement, politics and politicians, Pan-Africanism, organized action, and their ambivalences about the next stage of the "Black struggle." While these "militant" women discussed Black women and Black men relationships of different sorts, abuse and violence, if uncovered at all, did not appear in the study's finished form.

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[39] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* 65-75.

[40] Jody Miller, "Violence Against Urban African American Girls: Challenges for Feminist Advocacy," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 24, no. 2 (2008): 148-162, doi:10.1177/1043986208315477.

[41] Marjorie Fine Knowles, "Foundation Grants to Women's Groups." *Women's Studies Newsletter*, 1, no. 5 (Fall 1973): 9.

[42] Inez Smith Reid, "*Together" Black Women* (New York: The Third Press, 1975), p. ix.

Held January 8-9, 1972, the first symposium organized by the BWCDF was in Chicago, Illinois, also Eric Monte's hometown as noted above, the second on April 8-9, 1972, in Atlanta, Georgia, and the third on March 29-30, 1974, in Washington, D.C. The Chicago symposium was titled "Black Women: The Ties that Divide and Bind-Program for Action" and was held at the Roberts Motel. The Executive Director, Inez Smith Reid, described the Chicago symposium as "fantastic, frustrating, incredible and turbulent." She viewed Chicago as significant among the cities to hold their symposium, "pondering its impact upon individual lives as well as upon the total Black struggle."[43] Reid did not mention violence against Black women in Chicago as a topic discussed in her follow-up letter and neither did Charlayne Hunter in her 1972 *New York Times* article reporting on the symposium.[44]

Based on available written records, the symposia panel sessions and workshops did not engage with the topic of physical violence and aggression against Black women. There was some awareness of the problem, however, during the 1974 symposia planning process. An undated letter from Reid sent to the "friends" of the foundation included a workshop instruction sheet for the "miniconsultation" planned for Washington, D.C., in March of 1974. In addition to hypertension, sterilization, cancer, suicide, and depression, Reid requested information, thoughts, and ideas on "victims of violence."[45] However, neither the final program nor the report of the miniconsultation in the June 1974 *Ebony* magazine article mention victims of violence.[46] It is difficult to know whether grassroots organizations such as the Black Women's Community Development Foundation participated in a "conspiracy of silence," much like Mattie Black, but only on a larger social organizational level.

[43] Inez Smith Reid, "January 26, 1972, correspondence," Black Women's Community Development Foundation, 1972-1974, L1979-24_1624_028, Box 1624, Folder 28, Item 71, National Domestic Workers Union (U.S.) records, L1979-24. Special Collections, accessed January 19, 2025, https://archivesspace.library.gsu.edu/repositories/2/archival_objects/54302.

[44] Charlayne Hunter, "200 Black Women Have Dialogue," Special to *The New York Times*, January 10, 1972, https://www.nytimes.com/1972/01/10/archives/200-black-women-have-dialogue-debate-issues-that-differ-from-white.html.

[45] Inez Smith Reid, "n.d., correspondence," Black Women's Community Development Foundation, 1972-1974, L1979-24_1624_028, Box 1624, Folder 28, Item 79, National Domestic Workers Union (U.S.) records, L1979-24. Special Collections, accessed January 19, 2025, https://archivesspace.library.gsu.edu/repositories/2/archival_objects/54302.

[46] "Stresses and Strains on Black Women," *Ebony* (June 1974): 33-40.

CONCLUSION

Eric Monte's pilot teleplay, "Who's Got the Rent," for the series *The Black Family* (which later became *Good Times*) presented a perspective of the intersectional identities of Black working-class women in a distressed urban community. Behind the scenes, Monte experienced his own symbolic annihilation fighting for an approximation of authentic Blackness on the soon-to-be sitcom about an urban, working-class, Black, nuclear family. Racist ideologies caused Norman Lear to trivialize Monte's knowledge of Black culture. Monte oppressed the women he envisioned through sexism. The teleplay shows that the possibility of physical aggression and violence towards Black working-class women, including Mattie and Thelma, were issues that existed in the Black's family culture and in their community's public housing culture. At the same time, Black women's advocacy groups did not appear prepared or equipped to discuss violence against Black women and girls publicly.

This analysis of the fictional symbolic annihilation of Mattie and Thelma Black reflects the marginalization of Black women in American primetime television, as well as may serve as an indicator of the marginalized status of Black women in American society. Unfortunately, symbolic annihilation, specifically condemnation, continues into the twenty-first century towards Mattie's counterpart, Florida, in Maroon Alchemist's 2019 Twitter thread, "DEBUNKING THE MYTH: A thread exposing the truth about one of America's favorite T.V. mothers, FLORIDA EVANS": "Though highly revered by most as a strong, black mother figure for '70s television, behind the thin veil of virtue she hid behind, was a woman who caused nothing but pain and suffering to those around her with her actions." Written almost fifty years apart, symbolic annihilation still follows Florida today.

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Blackness, Femininity, and Queerness within Afro-Peruvian Female Hip Hop

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Historically, Hip Hop has been the music medium where marginalized voices outside the mainstream express ideas and narrate realities to transform oppressive situations. Similarly in Peru, Hip Hop has been the music medium for political expression of the working class. However, Afro-Peruvian female artists are changing the local scene by bringing critiques of the normalization of oppression towards Black and female bodies. This article explores how Karolinativa and Yanna, two Black female artists from Peru, are using Hip Hop as a medium to narrate the realities of Black female bodies who are deemed as queer for their representations of race, gender, and sexuality. This article aims to explore the ways these artists are disruptive to the local scene while their music "queers" the official narratives of what it means to be Peruvian. I analyze this through an art-media analysis, engaging with the songs, lyric content, and music videos in the musical propositions of Karolinativa and Yanna.

KEYWORDS: Hip Hop, femininity, Peru, Black female body, Karolinativa, Yanna

INTRODUCTION

Hip hop is a cultural movement that originated in New York City in the 1970s. It has evolved from a local cultural movement to one of the most influential and widely consumed music genres in the United States and worldwide. It is also a form of Black art and expressive culture, allowing Black communities to communicate and narrate their realities.[1] This music genre

[1] Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994)

has been a space where young Black people find their way to narrate "the pleasures and problems of Black urban life in contemporary America"[2] and has become the voice of the people who are considered the others, marginalized, and non-normative.

In the context of Latin America, Hip Hop emerged as part of the capitalist expansion of American culture. Throughout the 1990s, the first Hip Hop groups were created in the region. In these territories, artists began mixing American Hip Hop elements with local social justice claims and regional sounds.[3] This adaptation has allowed Latin American Hip Hop to continue serving as an expression of marginalized communities, including Indigenous and Black communities.

In Peru, Hip Hop groups began forming in the urban peripheral areas after the cultural, economic, geographical, and political changes that occurred as a product of the neoliberal policies applied in the mid-1990s. These changes were influenced by the end of the terrorism era,[4] which forced many people to migrate to the capital city looking for better opportunities and running away from political violence. Most migrants in the capital city did not have a place to live and were forced to occupy government-owned land. Migrants started to organize themselves to occupy these spaces and demand ownership of the territory to build houses and communities through self-organization and self-construction.[5] These dynamics created a new socio-geographical area called *Conos*. *Conos* are peripheral areas characterized by the lack of public services, economic opportunities, and access to the labor market. It is in these geographical spaces that Peruvian Hip Hop has built its roots. Hip hop works as the expression of the local youth and speaks about the realities of living in *conos*.

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[2] Rose, *Black Noise*, 2.

[3] Tanya Saunders. *Cuban Underground Hip Hop: Black thoughts, Black revolution, Black modernity*. (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2015), 3.

[4] Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, *Informe Final* (Lima: Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 2003). The Truth and Reconciliation defines the period from 1980s to 2000s as *"conflicto armado interno"* (armed intern conflict) recognizing political violence from armed terrorist groups and the political armed forces affecting principally to the Quechua Indigenous populations.

[5] Pablo Vega Centeno. *Autoconstruccion y Reciprocidad: Cultura y Solucion de Problemas Urbanos*. (Lima: Institutio de Desarrollo Urbano - CENCA, 1992), 19. This occupation allowed migrants to build houses and communities through a self-construction process, resulting in a communal effort without urban planning and governmental support

Consequently, Peruvian Hip Hop is close to the demands of the working class, though there are not many studies that analyze the racial and ethnic dynamics within it. One of the few studies is Diego Peralta's[6] analysis that explains that Afro-Peruvian culture has been included in the sound of Peruvian Hip Hop through percussion instruments such as *cajita*, *cajon*, and *quijada*.[7] Even though there are few studies, in the last ten years, there has been an increase in the number of Afro-Peruvians who use Hip Hop as a medium to talk about the issues that Black people face in Peru. Artists such as Karolinativa, Sese, Chispa Rap MC, LaMamba, La Prinz, Nero Lvigi, Luen, Necia, Nera Cheka, Akeellah, Yanna, and Gilow are clear examples of those expressions.

This article analyzes how two Afro-Peruvian female artists, Yanna and Karolinativa, use Hip Hop to challenge dominant narratives of national identity in Peru. In a society where racial and gender stereotypes intersect to define *peruanidad*,[8] these artists disrupt normative and *mestizo* ideologies by centering their identities as Black women. Through their lyrical content and visuals, these artists narrate their experiences as Black women, making visible how racism and sexism work to oppress and marginalize Black women's existence, rendering them as non-normative. Yanna's and Karolinativa's music works as a form of resistance against racism, sexism, and misogyny that determines beauty, behavior, and social roles. In doing so, they both queer the national imaginary and the local Hip Hop scene, offering a different construction of what it means to be a Black Peruvian woman outside oppressive frameworks.

Carolina Carbajal, or Karolinativa, is considered one of the pioneers in Peruvian Hip Hop who has released multiple singles and features. She is a fashion designer and has had a musical career for over ten years, and in

[6] Diego Peralta Loayza, *La evolución de las producciones musicales de hip hop en Lima Metropolitana: la construcción de una nueva identidad (1990-2022)* (Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas, 2023), 58.

[7] Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, *Patrimonio Inmaterial Afroperuano* (Lima: Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, 2016), 49. *Cajon* and *cajita* are Afro-Peruvian percussion instruments that were part of the adaptation of the African drums to the realities of enslaved Black people that were brought to Peru. The Ministry of Culture from Peru recognize this instruments as part of the "transmission of cultural, aesthetics, and technology elements in the Afro-Peruvian communities through generations". *Quijada de burro* is part of the mandibular bones of a donkey that is used by the musicians with a stick to create rhythms. It is used around Latin America and the Caribbean in Afro-Latin music.

[8] Víctor Andrés Belaúnde, *Peruanidad*, 6th ed. (Lima: Imprenta Editorial Lumen, 1987). Peruanidad refers to the Peruvian national identity built under mestizaje.

2017, she released her first EP, *La Familia,* which explores her connection to Afro-Peruvian culture. Brenda Carpio, or Yanna, is one of the newer, most prominent Black queer Hip Hop artists. She grew up in San Martin de Porres and later moved to France, where she studied business administration. She later returned to Peru and engaged in activism on social media. In 2020, she released her first single, "MarcaPeru" and in 2023, she released her first album, *Hija del Pecado,* in which she narrates her experiences of being Black and queer in a conservative society where morality is heavily influenced by the idea of sin.

This article incorporates an art media analysis, focusing on the lyrical content of the songs of Karolinativa and Yanna, as well as the visual representations of gender and race in their music videos. The article also explores themes of Blackness, Black feminism, queerness, and Hip Hop. The discussion begins with examining the non-normative theorizations associated with Black femininity and continues by analyzing approaches to queerness and non-normativity in Hip Hop. The article concludes by analyzing how these artists deconstruct the national narratives about identity, Blackness, gender, and queerness in the Peruvian Hip Hop context.

BLACK FEMINISM AND QUEERNESS

Historically, womanhood has been constructed around the white and cisgender female body as the normative standard,[9] whereas Black womanhood has been cataloged as deviant, non-normative, and queer.[10] Black feminist and Black Queer Studies scholars have expanded theorizations and intersections of Blackness and queerness, understanding queerness beyond the LGBTQ identity. For instance, Cathy Cohen argues that queerness transcended the identity of non-heterosexual relationships; queerness is also about those outside the normative understanding of "race and class."[11] This implies that race influences how heteronormativity and gender dynamics are constructed

[9] Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 73.

[10] Marquis Bey, *Black Trans Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), 4. Bey argues that Black womanhood has been constructed under colonial and white ideologies,

[11] Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, And Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential Of Queer Politics?" in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 25. Cohen states that queerness: "the [ones] outside of the dominant constructed norm of state-sanctioned white middle-and-upper-class heterosexuality."

around whiteness. Furthermore, Jafari Allen mentions that "black subjects are already queer relative to normative ideals of the person,"[12] as these ideals have been constructed under the notion of who is human, which is a gendered and racialized concept.[13] The racialized construction of who is and is not human is also tied to the construction of citizenship, especially in the Latin American contexts, where *mestizaje* has been part of the ideology that construct the national identities.[14]

Building on these ideas, Hortense Spillers also argues that Black women have been constructed outside of normative gender. Spillers theorizes how Black women in slavery and its legacies are rendered as ungendered.[15] Furthermore, Nikki Lane expands this idea, theorizing around the "queerness of Black woman,"[16] stating that "Black queerness derives from these [...] bodies [that] are deemed racial, sexual, and gender deviants [...] that exceed normative prescriptions."[17] Drawing on this conceptualization, I argue that Black female Hip Hop artists in Peru expand the conceptualization of queerness by using Hip Hop as a medium to deconstruct the normative conceptualizations of Blackness and femininity in the context of Peru. By doing so, Karolinativa and Yanna are queering the local Peruvian Hip Hop scene by bringing critiques to the conceptualization of normative *peruanidad*, criticizing the stereotypes of gender and race while presenting representations of Blackness and queerness by being non-normative in their class, race, and gender.

QUEER HIP HOP

Historically, Hip Hop has been a music genre that portrays of hegemonic masculinity,[18] however, the genre has also been a space where Black women express their realities, dreams, and desires outside patriarchal and heteronor-

[12] Jafari S. Allen, "Black/Queer/Diaspora at the Current Conjuncture Introduction," *GLQ* 18, no. 2–3 (2012): 222.
[13] Marquis Bey, *Black Trans Feminism,* 15.
[14] Peter Wade, "Estudios Afrodescendientes en Latinoamérica: Racismo y Mestizaje," *Tabula Rasa*, no. 27 (2017): 34. Wade defines mestizaje as "the ideology and practices that denies racism and racial hierarchies."
[15] Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 73
[16] Nikki Lane, "Megan Thee Stallion sings the blues: Black queer theory and intersectionality," in *The Routledge Companion to Intersectionalities*, ed. Jennifer C. Nash and Samantha Pinto (New York: Routledge, 2023), 514.
[17] Ibid, 516.
[18] Rose, *Black Noise*, 122.

mative expectations.[19] Joan Morgan in *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks It Down* explores this contradiction.[20] Hip hop is the space that has reproduced misogyny against Black women and queerphobia against LGTBQ identity. However, Morgan also highlights Hip Hop for storytelling the realities lived by Black women, as well as being a space for communal healing.[21] This is central to understanding the ways Black women subvert gender oppression by using Hip Hop as part of Black women's politics and feminist epistemologies.

Extending the idea of Black feminism and Hip Hop, I also analyze the conceptualization of queerness in connection to the genre. Some authors argue that Hip Hop is a queer expression because it has been created outside the normative media mainstream.[22] Rinaldo Walcot claims that Hip Hop is queer because it "emerges out of the hood, or should we say queer histories of the urban Black diaspora."23 Similarly, Jeffrey Q. McCune manifests that "hip-hop often operates as the nexus between the black and the queer."[24] McCune theorizes that it is queer because Hip Hop represents the voice of the ones unheard. It also creates space for the queer desire to be expressed. In this sense, queerness in Hip Hop is about the ways artists resist dominant and normative construction while challenging racist narratives.

QUEERING THE PERUVIAN

In Peru, national identities have been constructed under *mestizaje* ideology. *Mestizaje* views the mixing of multiple races as the foundational narrative for constructing national identity in most Latin American countries.[25] *Mestizaje* attempts to create a mixed identity where everyone is from the same mixed

[19] Ibid, 146; Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, 187.

[20] Joan Morgan, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: My Life as a Hip-Hop Feminist* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 77.

[21] Ibid, 77. Morgan states "Hip-Hop isn't only the instrumental in exposing black men's pain, it brings the healing sistas need right to the surface," as she explores the potential of Hip Hop.

[22] Rinaldo Walcott. "Boyfriends with Clits and Girlfriends with Dicks: Hip Hop's Queer Future." *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 2, no 2 (2013): 168-173; Tavia Nyong'o. "Queer Hip Hop and its Dark Precursors" *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 2, no. 2 (2013): 144-146; Riley C, Snorton. "As Queer as Hip Hop Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International." *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 2, no. 2 (2013): pp. vi-x.

[23] Walcott. "Boyfriends with Clits," 168.

[24] Jeffrey Q. McCune, ""Out" in the Club: The Down Low, Hip-Hop, and the Architexture of Black Masculinity." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2008): 302.

[25] Peter Wade, "Estudios Afrodescendientes," 34.

ethnic group. It acknowledges the historical presence of different racial and ethnic groups but reduces their presence to the past. This works as a mechanism of racial and cultural erasure that minimizes the violent experiences of Black and Indigenous peoples. While it recognizes these groups in the past, it also reduces their present presence to just cultural practices.

The idea of unity and harmonious ethnic and racial relationships in Latin America, as reflected by the mestizo ideology, is understood through the concept of racial democracy. [26] Peru is also part of the myth of racial democracies with the narrative that "everyone is mestizo." This has resulted in the Afro-Peruvian population becoming a marginalized community with fewer opportunities.[27] Structural racism leaves many of the Afro-Peruvian people without basic human rights. In addition to structural racism, there is also the daily interpersonal racism that Afro-Peruvians face. Interpersonal discrimination, colonial stereotypes, inflammatory racist jokes, make it difficult for us to inhabit a country that is constantly denying racism and normalizing this type of racism.

Since the idea of Peruvian identity is constructed through a dominant narrative of mestizo identity, Karolinativa and Yanna criticize this idea by queering the idea of the Peruvian identity. By reclaiming Black Peruvian History and Black cultural elements in their music, they both criticize those narratives. For example, in her song and video of "MarcaPeru," Yanna challenges the state's branding campaign of the same name that marketed Peru as a multicultural paradise in order to attract tourists. This campaign relied on the promotion of diversity by presenting folkloric images, reducing Black and Indigenous lives to a cultural product. In this song, Yanna subverts that idea and instead introduces us to the real country. She sings: "Here if you are a woman/ You are not allowed to raise your voice/ Here you defend patriotism/ Hierarchy and fish *ceviche*/ And in foreign countries/ We are well positioned/ *Machu Picchu*, the *polleras*,[28] and the Afro Peruvian *festejo*/[29] But inside, we reject each other/ For being Black, Indian, and from the mountains."[30] The lyrics in the music video are accompanied by visuals that disrupt the idea of

[26] Lélia Gonzalez, *Por um feminismo afrolatino-americano* (São Paulo: Zahar, 2020), 234.
[27] Ministerio de Cultura. *Política Nacional del Pueblo Afroperuano al 2030*. Lima: Ministerio de Cultura, 2020.
[28] Traditional Peruvian skirts.
[29] A traditional Afro-Peruvian dance.
[30] All lyrical translations have been made by the author.

racial democracy. Yanna's music video centers on the presence of Black and brown queer bodies.

Similarly, Karolinativa criticizes the idea of Peru as a brand in her song, "A mi nadie," where she expresses how it has been for her growing up as a Black woman that constantly had to resist the narratives of national identity that includes exclusion and poverty for the working-class communities that live in the *conos*. The music video follows a young Black girl moving from downtown Lima to the *conos*, where there is a lack of resources, infrastructure, and informal economies. The lyrics expand on this critique as Karolinativa mentions, "We are victims of racism/ They created lies/ Making fake politics/ On the news/ Violence, chaos, delinquency/ Hunger, poverty/ Peru is not a brand." Karolinativa expands her critique to the government's national narrative and to the public narrative of branding Peru as the ideal place that silences the realities that people face in the neoliberal fantasy that continues to perpetuate marginalization in Black and working-class communities.

Yanna and Karolinativa deconstruct and criticize the idea of *peruanidad*, challenging the homogenized image that the government pushes through marketing campaigns. Their critiques are also expanded to the Black erasure of Afro-Peruvian history. For example, Karolinativa criticizes this erasure by challenging the official narrative that reduce Black history to mention that Afro-Peruvians were just enslaved people. In her song, "Cipriano y Jose," Karolinativa re-tells the history of Black Peruvians who always fought against oppression. She tells the story of Black people's agency in revolutions and uprisings, pursuing their aim for freedom. She sings: "Ashe for you/ And for all the homies that fought/ Ashe," invoking an Afro-diasporic spiritual affirmation that honors the ones who fought.

Similarly, Yanna's song "Quema" addresses the colonial legacies embedded in the official histories that reduce Blackness. She sings: "I am tired of hearing white history/ We weren't slaves/ It was a colonialized land/ Stolen gold. Forced work/ Enslaved Black people." Yanna is re-telling the history by recognizing the violent process of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. She critiques the dominant European historiography that minimize the role of colonization, even resisting the dehumanizing that reduces Black people to just "slaves." She recognizes the violence in the forced labor, subjugation, and resource extraction that is still present in the roots of the economy of Peru and Latin America.

Additionally, Yanna and Karolinativa center their music around Black culture by reclaiming ancestral heritage through Afro-Peruvian traditions. In their music, they remix traditional Hip Hop beats with Afro-Peruvian percussion musical instruments such as *cajon, cajita,* and *quijada de burro*. They also have references to Afro-Peruvian songs, remixing, sampling, or mentioning some of the traditional and classic songs that are famous in the Afro-Peruvian culture. Visually, they include these elements in their music videos.

In her song, "Cipriano y José," Karolinativa engages in a historical reclamation by remixing the song "Mayoral" by Lucila Campos, a famous Afro-Peruvian singer. Campos's song tells the story of an uprising in the plantation system and recounts the history of Afro-Peruvians who were forced to work in the agro-industrial system after the emancipation. The title *mayoral* refers to the overseer responsible of controlling the labor of Afro-Peruvians on the plantations. Through an act of resistance, the workers used their farm tools to kill the overseer. Karolinativa draws on this historical event to introduce the public to the perspective of Cipriano, the leader of the uprising mentioned in the song. With this, she gives voice to an erased figure of Black resistant, using her music to retell the history that is not present in the national identity memory.

Yanna also reclaims the Afro-Peruvian cultural memory. In her song, "Quema," she uses Afro-Peruvian instruments while at the same time, in the chorus, she sings: "Burn burn/ El alcaltraz" in reference to the Afro-Peruvian rhythm in which choreography involves fire.[31] "El Alcatraz," sung by Arturo "Zambo" Cavero, is one of the most traditional songs of the musical genre, Alcatraz. The chorus is "You won't burn me/ El Alcatraz" and reference the dance that involves a couple where one tries to set on fire a piece of cloth sitting on the waist of the other, metaphorically engaging a representation of desire and danger. In the same way, Yanna's song, "Millone$," mentions "And come Black man/ And burn my light" using the lyrics of the El Alcatraz and referencing the traditional dance.

Expanding on the representations of Afro-Peruvian culture, Yanna's song, "Flow Caro," featuring another Afro-Peruvian artist, Gilow, includes elements of Afro-Peruvian culture. She sings: "It is my birthday/ And we will

[31] Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, *Patrimonio*, 83.

make party/ In the table, there will always be *carapulcra* y *sopa seca*[32]/ A *tamalito*[33] with *manteca*[34]/ Playing a *Zamacueca*[35]/ El Zambo and Rebeca[36]/ There is *tutuma/*[37] and everyone commits sins." With this, she introduces us to the most relevant elements of the Afro-Peruvian culture: food, music, traditional dances, and by mentioning other Afro-Peruvian artists.

Visually, both artists also have representations of Blackness by bringing Afro-Peruvian elements into their music videos. In her song, "No Me Rindo," Karolinativa shows short clips of her family, her concerts, and her daily life. Some clips show people playing Afro-Peruvian instruments such as *cajon.* Similarly, in the music video for "Millone$," Yanna includes images of Black women and girls dancing and singing to the song's rhythm. Some of them are playing *cajon*, dancing to Afro-Peruvian music, and even eating tamales. Yanna centers these images while she shows Black joy as resistance. In her song, "La Vuelta," she also includes images of her family and one frame of herself listening to Victoria Santa Cruz, one of the biggest referents of Afro-Peruvian culture. Her most famous work, "Me gritaron Negra," Cruz narrates what it means to be a Black woman in a racist society. So, for Yanna, Victoria Santa Cruz is also a reference in her artwork. Yanna mentions in her song, "La Vuelta," that Victoria Santa Cruz helped her to navigate her childhood around racial interpellation and a reclamation of Blackness. She sings: "My dad made me listen to Victoria Santa Cruz/ And finally, I could see some light." The music video shows that frame showing one of Santa Cruz's vinyl.

[32] Ibid, 25–27. *Carapulcra y sopa seca* is one of the most recognized Afro-Peruvian dishes, made from potatoes, peanuts, and *ají panca*, a traditional dry pepper from Peru. The Ministry of Culture in Peru recognizes this dish from the Chincha and San Luis de Cañete regions, local communities with a significant Afro-Peruvian population. The Ministry also acknowledges carapulcra as part of the intangible cultural heritage of Afro-Peruvian people, representing ancestral knowledge passed down through generations.

[33] Ibid, 38. *Tamales* are part of the culinary tradition of Afro-Peruvian families and communities.

[34] *Manteca* could be translated to lard. In Peru, *Manteca* is associated with Afro-Peruvian cuisine.

[35] Afro-Peruvian traditional dance.

[36] In reference to Arturo Zambo Cavero, one of the most famous Afro-Peruvian singers.

[37] An Afro-Peruvian traditional drink made of pisco and sweet wine. It is usually consumed in El Carmen, an Afro-Peruvian community.

DECONSTRUCTING RACIAL AND GENDER STEREOTYPES

Through their music, Yanna and Karolinativa reimagine themselves outside of normative and colonial ideas that reduce Black womanhood to stereotypes of hyper-sexualization, criminalization, and submission. In her song, "MarcaPeru," Yanna sings: "Here, if you are a woman/ You are not allowed to raise your voice," criticizing the gender expectation that women should conform passively to the imposed ideas on them. On the other hand, Karolinativa takes a more direct approach in the song, "Cual es el problema," where she questions racist and sexist ideas that construct beauty under Eurocentric standards. Karolinativa connects beauty standards to the politics of blanqueamiento that have dominated the Peruvian national narratives. Furthermore, she criticizes the idea that Black women are considered problematic for not following these expectations around femininity. In the song, she asks: "What is the problem/ That I am a proud woman/ Who is sure about her identity/ What is the problem with me/ Being naturally beautiful/ And what is the problem? That I am a free woman who fights all the time." Karolinativa uses this rhetorical question to embrace Black aesthetics, centering on the use of natural hair, self-love, and refusals as acts of resistance.

Yanna also narrates her process of self-love and identification as a Black woman in the song "La Vuelta." She recounts her experiences of exclusion at school when nobody wanted to play with her because of her race. The song becomes a narrative of healing and transformation as she recalls the affirming messages that her mother gave her growing up. She sings: "My mom told me not to listen to what they say/ People don't know about beauty/ You are beautiful, period/ Now trust me when I say to you/ You do not go to school to make friends./ It is not your fault if they do not play with you/ You got to realize that you have your own brightness/ Don't let them take that away from you/ My love. Don't let them touch your heart." These affirmations work as a source of strengths that influence her process of identity formation and self-empowerment. She uses the metaphor of *dar la Vuelta* (turn things around) to demonstrate how she turns the stereotypes away. She sings: "I am tired of the stereotypes/ They say that I am disorganized/ That I will always be bad/ And to work I gotta straighten my hair/ They said that I don't make money decently/ That I am a criminal for having tattoos/ Those are all evil tales/ Violent arguments." Visually, Yanna shows images of her wearing a wig until she removes it and takes off the makeup, showing that she feels beautiful being herself, proudly using her natural hair in the form of a big afro.

CONCLUSION

Yanna and Karolinativa are redefining what being a Black woman in Peru means. They are rejecting the normative colonial constructions of whiteness, femininity, and Blackness, and through their music, Yanna and Karolinativa challenge the colonial narrative of what is to be Peruvian, which has historically erased the presence of Black women presence in the country's formation. These artists are showing and reminding us that Peru, as a nation, is also Black, female, and queer. They oppose the racial and gender stereotypes that impose fixed definitions of womanhood. Their music engages with themes of Black beauty, ancestral heritage, and Afro-Peruvian culture. As Karolinativa asks the audience in her song, what is the problem with Karolinativa mentioning the Afro-Peruvian and queering the local Hip Hop scene? It is essential to include their artistic perspectives in the discussions about Black feminism within the Black Diaspora. As Yanna sings, "Chola, Black woman, and Latina," she is creating new narratives of Black womanhood in the Latin American context. Both Yanna and Karolinativa are queering the local scene, offering critiques of the standard definitions of being Black and a woman in Peru.

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Queer in an African Worldsense: The Spirituality of Sexuality in Nigeria and South Africa

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The globalization of queer thought and LGBT pride has resulted in socio-political power struggles to define authentic African traditions and identities. This paper explores what Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí terms an African "worldsense" in which the sacred and secular are thought together, and sexuality becomes a spiritual matter. Grounded in Black Queer Studies and radical African feminist thought, I examine woman-woman marriage in Igboland and the lived experiences of Zulu lesbian sangoma Nkuzi Zandile Nkabinde, and Igbo lesbian author, Unoma Azuah, as a queering of heteronormativity, sexuality, and gender. I conduct a close reading of their memoirs, ethnographic texts, and the novel, *Efuru*, by Flora Nwapa to argue that same-gender union and gender fluidity are not simply a matter of individual identity or desire, but a dynamic interplay of ancestry, customs, divination, and destiny. I contribute to scholarship that debunks the myth that queerness is un-African, but rather than define queerness in African terms, I explore how Indigenous African practices can disrupt and reframe global understandings of queerness itself. Ultimately, this paper challenges queer theorists to engage more deeply with African epistemologies that position sexuality and gender within a sacred social sense.

KEY TERMS: queer, LGBT, radical African feminism, worldsense, Indigenous Africa, reproduction, same-gender desire, gender fluidity

> "This child will neither marry a man as a life partner, nor bear children.... Onishe is her guardian goddess. She is not in her life to harm her.... She sustains her life.... This is her destiny, and you can't say it is not as good as any others."[1]

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-twentieth century, African women have been writing for a global audience in French and English, producing fiction and academic scholarship that serves to revise and expand universalist concepts of gender, woman, human, and more recently, queerness. They provide insider knowledge on Indigenous African cultures in opposition to early racist, colonial writings on Africa. I first learned of the practice of woman-woman marriages and fluid gender systems in Africa as an undergraduate. Ifi Amadiume showed that in the nineteenth-century, prior to European colonialism, Igboland was matriarchal, and women of wealth could cross into manhood through marriage to multiple wives.[2] She argued for a definition of matriarchal based not on the complete rule of women, but on matrifocality and female value. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí argued that in precolonial Yorubaland, gender as we know it did not exist at all.[3] Woman—*obirin* in Yoruba—was not embedded with hierarchy and inequality as it was in Europe. In my young mind, I thought of these as queer phenomena, but I discovered that Amadiume staunchly opposed the characterization of woman-woman marriages as lesbian relationships, and both she and Oyěwùmí were silent on transgender and gender nonconformity in Nigeria. These African scholars were presenting not queer practices, but different norms disrupted by Christian colonialism. Yet years later, as a scholar of Black queer studies, I return to these works to ask, how can they inform and expand queerness in our present day? How are same-gender union and gender fluidity treated in Africa now, in the twenty-first century?

My baseline definition of queer comes from Black queer studies scholar, Cathy Cohen, who "queers" queerness. She invites us to consider queer not as a homogenous homosexual identity in binary opposition to heterosexual-

[1] Unoma Azuah, *Embracing My Shadow: Growing Up Lesbian in Nigeria* (Burscough, Lancashire: Beaten Track Publishing, 2020), 106-7.
[2] Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books, 1987).
[3] Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

ity, but as a politic that foregrounds power relations and advocates for those with the least power.[4] Most notably, she highlights heterosexuals excluded from heteronormativity, such as Black and brown men and women in poverty, towards a radical queer politics. While I do maintain the popular definition of queer as an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT), I follow Cohen through my use of queer as a verb, a disruption of universalist, dominant, and normative frameworks of thinking. Queerness is fluid and changes in each socio-cultural context because one's relation to power and normativity is relative. In the Christian and Muslim dominant country of Nigeria,[5] women, rural, poor, and devotees of Indigenous African spiritual practices are among the most disadvantaged. With those who exist at the intersections of these identity markers as the focus of this study, I also engage radical African feminist thought. Simidele Dosekun describes this as a feminism whose purpose is to radically reimagine and reshape all power relations to transform society for the betterment of all.[6] I consider this also as a form of queer African feminism, which shares the same goals. I engage this framework to assert this paper's relevance to African contexts because I am writing as a scholar educated in the United States. The Western origins of the terms queer and feminist are not as relevant as the fact that African scholars, artists and activists of today define queer and feminist for themselves towards social transformation.

African woman scholars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries present an "African worldsense"[7] that situates Indigenous African spiritual practice as knowledge authority. Oyěwùmí coined the term *worldsense* to describe African cultures that privilege non-visual senses, in contrast to Western culture's obsession with sight, or worldview, as the source of all knowledge.[8] Indigenous here refers to African practices and knowledge that can be traced to pre-colonial times. I may sometimes use "traditional" and "religion" in place of "Indigenous" and "spiritual practice," respectively, following the scholar cited in that portion of the text. For this paper, I am primarily concerned

[4] Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" in *Black Queer Studies: a critical anthology.* edited by Patrick E. Johnson & Mae G. Henderson. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 22.

[5] Toyin Falola and Bukola Adeyemi Oyeniyi. *Nigeria* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 156.

[6] Simidele Dosekun, "Defending Feminism in Africa," *postamble* 3, no. 1 (2007): 46.

[7] Oyěwùmí, "Visualizing the Body: Western Theories and African Subjects" in *The Invention of Women.*

[8] Oyěwùmí, "Visualizing the Body," 3.

with the social and spiritual worldsenses, which are intertwined. In the African worldsense, the sacred and the secular are thought together.[9] Community is made up of children, adults, elders, healers, and spirits of Earth and the dead. Ancestors are a part of everything that exists.[10] Thus, the spirituality of sexuality refers to the influence of such spirits on human desire.

I contend specifically with the desire for biological children in Igboland, as reproduction is an expression of sexuality, and with the desire for same-gender sexual intimacy and gender expression in Nigeria and South Africa. In part I, I engage an Indigenous African social sense which dictates reproduction is central to human valuation and community cultivation. Through an exploration of woman-woman marriage, I re-think the binary of heterosexuality and queerness. In part II, I engage an African spiritual worldsense through the memoirs of Nigerian author, Unoma Azuah, and South African author, Nkuzi Zandile Nkabinde. River spirits and ancestral spirits, respectively, influence and support their lesbian identities and gender non-conformity. I read into the ways they claim queerness and Indigenous African practice to affirm their non-normative identities and practices. Musa W. Dube writes that African Indigenous religion—which is intertwined with culture—"must be continuously reinterpreted for different contexts and times."[11] With legislators and religious leaders citing African Indigenous tradition as justification for queerphobia,[12] I explore, how is African Indigenous knowledge and practice used to affirm queer life? I seek to further queer "queer," to further globalize the concept through deep engagement with African Studies scholarship. I focus on Indigenous African practices to argue that they push us to rethink heteronormativity, queerness, and the full horizon of human sexuality.

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[9] Musa W. Dube, "Postcolonial Feminist Perspective African Indigenous Religion(s)," in *Gender and African Indigenous Religions.* edited by Musa W. Dube, Sylvia Owusu-Ansah, and Telesia K Musili (Routledge, 2024),
25.

[10] Nkuzi Zandile Nkabinde, *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Fanele, 2008), 76.

[11] Musa W. Dube, ""*Adinkra!* Four Hearts Joined Together: On Becoming Healing-Teachers of African Indigenous Religion/s in HIV & AIDS Prevention." in *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye.* edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 146.

[12] See Sokari Ekine, "Contesting narratives of queer Africa." in *Queer African Reader.* edited by Hakima Abbas & Sokari Ekine (Dakar, Senegal: Pambazuka Press, 2013) and E. Frances White, "Foreword" in *Reclaiming Afrikan: Queer Perspectives on Sexual and Gender Identities.* ed. Zethu Matebeni (Athlone, South Africa: Modjaj Books Pty Ltd., 2014).

THE QUEERNESS THAT LED TO WOMAN-WOMAN MARRIAGE

African and feminist scholar, Ifi Amadiume, released the first book length study by an African on woman-woman marriage in 1987—*Male daughters, female husbands: gender and sex in an African society.* Here, she shows that gender in Igboland is a social construct influenced by wealth and social status. This text is based on fieldwork she conducted between 1980-1982 in her hometown of Nnobi, a matrifocal culture[13] with a rich oral tradition dating back eight to ten generations. Her study spans pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence Nigeria. The text is not queer in the LGBT sense, but Amadiume does queer—as in, disrupt—the early Western feminist concept that gender-based inequality and patriarchy are inherent to all cultures. She shows that in Igboland, women held positions of power and influence over women and men alike. These women were often "female husbands"—women who married one or more wives. Marriage "was the means of becoming rich through control over the labor of others by way of polygamy, whether man-to-woman marriage or woman-to-woman marriage. The Nnobi flexible gender system made either possible."[14] Women could cross into manhood through marriage union to other women. Thus, gender was closely tied to economy. Families who lacked male children or favored their female children could keep their daughters at home. These women were afforded male status and called male daughters. They could marry wives to bear children who would continue their father's lineage and inherit their wealth. With these exceptions, only sons could continue the family lineage. Thus, in contrast to Amadiume, scholars describe Igbo culture as a traditionally patriarchal culture that privileges male children.[15] The institution of woman-woman marriage also arose as a social welfare system for widowed and elderly women to have caregivers.[16]

Woman-woman marriage is still practiced to this day, long after the publication of *Male Daughters, Female Husbands.* Amadiume's work was groundbreaking for revealing pathways of women's agency in pre-colonial Igboland, but re-

[13] "Matrifocal/mother-focused: a household arrangement around the mother and her children, the focal or reference point being the mother." Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender & Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 40.
[14] Amadiume, 42.
[15] Aliyu, "Woman-woman marriage"; Enemo, et. al, "Woman-to-Woman Marriage"; Emmanuel Azubuike, "The Woman Who Married a Woman in Igboland," *The Republic*, February 21, 2025, https://rpublc.com/vol9-no1/woman-who-married-a-woman-igboland/.
[16] I.P. Enemo, M.C. Anozie, S.I. Nwatu, and O. Oguejiofor, "Woman-to-woman marriage in the South-East of Nigeria Versus the Prohibitory Regime of Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013," *African Journal of International and Comparative Law* 32, no. 3 (August 2024): 388.

cent twenty-first century scholarship emphasizes the flaws of woman-woman marriage, characterizes it as hierarchal and patriarchal. Scholar Egodi Uchendu argues that today, woman-woman marriages have deleterious consequences on elderly female husbands, female wives, and the children born from these unions.[17] She claims that female wives are not a dependable source of elder care, and they often suffer social isolation from the dominant Christian and Muslim social sphere. A 2025 article by Emmanuel Azubuike shows that there is more stigma around woman-to-woman marriages today.[18] In his family, there is silence and tension around his aunt's decision to marry a wife and become a female husband. Her wife bore a daughter, but the union did not last. The child now lives with Azubuike's aunt rather than her birth mother, because the female husband has custody of the child according to customary law. This situation led Azubuike to agree that woman-woman marriage is an outdated institution, one that will cause future social problems and confusion for the child. I.P. Enemo et. al. studied court cases in Nigeria to show that while lower courts ruled in favor of customary laws that support woman-woman marriages, higher state courts consistently ruled against defenders of the institution. In the documentary *Women Who Marry Wives*, one interlocutor describes woman-woman marriage as prostitution because the wife has little agency over her body. She is obligated to have sex with any male the female husband chooses. Amadiume herself wrote that the wives of female husbands were often treated as slaves. Uchendu furthermore describes it as a life of servitude.

In this way, woman-woman marriage is queered in the national, dominant imagination, in a Nigeria of today that is Westernized and patriarchal.[19] It does not fit neatly into heteronormativity because it is so stigmatized in Nigeria. It does not align with radical African feminism, because it disadvantages many women. Women, too, maintain patriarchy through the marriage of one or multiple wives, to advance their personal and family's wealth and power. Nor does it fit neatly into queerness. This practice has been misnamed as an example of lesbianism in Indigenous African cultures. Amadiume foreclosed this idea because love did not bring these women together, it was taboo for them to engage in sexual relations with one another, and their union was not

[17] TIERs Nigeria, The Initiative for Equal Rights, "Documentary – Where Women Marry Wives," YouTube, March 29, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwMB1YvaBYw.
[18] Emmanuel Azubuike, "The Woman Who Married a Woman in Igboland."
[19] Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women & Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 8.

egalitarian. The female husband held power over her female wives, who were sworn to serve her as she saw fit. But decades later, scholars Serena Dankwa and Rafeeat Aliyu re-open this possibility: "Is it impossible that lesbian-like women in the pre-colonial past could have similarly manipulated the society sanctioned woman-to-woman marriage to achieve personal goals?"[20]

It is certainly possible that woman-woman marriages could have been and could be queer(ed) in the lesbian or bisexual sense. Female husbands and their wives could share physical, romantic, and sexual intimacy similar to lesbian relationships. Even elderly women could seek out female wives to fulfill their sexual desires, as intergenerational same-gender romance occurs throughout the African diaspora.[21] If this type of intimacy did occur, it would have to be in secret. Both parties were expected to rely on male partners for sexual pleasure. Unlike most lesbian relationships, female husbands often consulted with family and community members to choose their wife and sperm donor, if it was not the female husband's husband, and pay the bride price. Thus, to imagine romantic love and sex between female husbands and wives is to queer the norm of woman-woman marriages, is to disrupt the hierarchy embedded in the institution of woman-woman marriage. This queer imagination is largely speculative; same-gender erotic desire in pre-twentieth-century Africa is under-researched. With modernization, scholars suggest that the institution of woman-woman marriage is outdated and insufficient to address family expansion and elder care. Uchendu advocates for improved social welfare programs, but the state of Nigeria is too uncertain now to rely on that.[22] It is not my place to suggest solutions, but I imagine that queer and radical African feminist politics may be more useful for addressing these issues on the psychosocial level. The stigmatization of women who cannot bear (male) children, or may not want to birth children, is a queer and African feminist issue.

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[20] Aliyu, "Woman-woman marriage"; Serena Owusua Dankwa, *Knowing women: same-sex intimacy, gender, and identity in postcolonial Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 31.

[21] As shown in the work of Gloria Wekker, *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), young women were often introduced into the institution of *mati* work—partnered sex and the sharing of resources between women, and sometimes women and men—by women 40, 50, or even 60 years their senior. Nkuzi Zandile Nkabinde's first lesbian relationship was at 13 years old with a 30-year-old woman, as written in Nkuzi Zandile Nkabinde, *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me,* 33.

[22] Emeka Anaeto, et. al. "Nigeria, others face uncertain economic outlook — Yemi Kale," *Vanguard,* April 10, 2025, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/04/nigeria-others-face-uncertain-economic-outlook-yemi-kale/.

The institution of woman-woman marriage teaches us that same-sex union is not inherently queer, and that heterosexual relationship is not strictly the union of man with one or more women. Perhaps we can begin to think of it as a queer heterosexuality or refuse to label it at all. The institution instead reveals a different type of queerness in Igboland that expands the definition beyond an umbrella term for LGBT. Many African feminists argue that child-bearing is central to African cultures.[23] Mercy Amba Oduyoye is one, having stated that "[t]o this day," in Yorubaland, "no African, man or woman, wants to be called *obonini*, a childless one."[24] That woman-woman marriage is still practiced shows that reproduction continues to be central to African collective and individual identity. Azubuike's aunt shared that she suffered humiliation and bullying for her lack of children. Flora Nwapa wrote, "[i]t was a curse not to have children. Her [Efuru's] people did not just take it as one of the numerous accidents of nature. It was regarded as a failure."[25] Because children in Igbo culture are considered a gift from the ancestors,[26] the absence of biological offspring carries stigma and shame. Reproduction is both a social and spiritual matter. Childlessness is queerness in the traditional African worldsense.

With this knowledge, I read Flora Nwapa's 1966 novel, *Efuru*, as a queer text. Set in a rural Igbo village, the spirituality of reproduction is made clear early on. The protagonist of the same name had been married for over a year and has not had a child. Desperate, Efuru asked her father for advice, and he instructed her to see a dibia, or a diviner-healer. The dibia stated that to have a baby, Efuru must sacrifice regularly to the ancestors and conduct certain rituals.[27] After three months of this, she became pregnant. She and her mother-in-law thanked Orisha when this came to be, which highlights the African worldsense that a child is a gift from the Divine. Efuru's offerings to

[23] See Buchi Emecheta, "Feminism with a small 'f'!" 1988. in *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory.* edited by Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publications, 2007); Mary E. Kolawole, *Womanism and African Consciousness* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1997); Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, "Gender, Feminist Theory, and Post-Colonial (Women's) Writing." in *African Gender Studies: a reader.* edited by Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Simidele Dosekun, "African Feminisms," in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies,* edited by Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso and Toyin Falola (Springer International Publishing AG, 2021), 55; Catherine Acholonu, *Motherism: the Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* (Owerri, Nigeria: Afa Publications, 1995).

[24] Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa,* 29.

[25] Flora Nwapa, *Efuru* (London: Heinemann, 1966), 207.

[26] Azubuike, "The Woman Who Married a Woman in Igboland."

[27] Nwapa, *Efuru,* 25.

the ancestors also highlights the mutual relationship between the living and the living-dead, who are or are more closely connected to the unborn. The truth Nwapa presents within her fiction is that in this African worldsense, one must live with a conscious awareness of the ancestors; to receive, one must acknowledge them through regular giving.

By the end of the novel, Efuru is left in the imagination of the reader as a childless, single woman. She has married two men and left both of them because they abandoned her. Her only child has died at a young age. Through recurring dreams, she is called to worship Uhamiri, goddess of the lake.[28] As before, a dibia instructed her to sacrifice regularly to the goddess and keep certain rituals and objects. We soon learn from the town gossip, however, that Uhamiri's devotees are all wealthy women without children.[29] If they had given birth, it was before they committed themselves to the goddess. The African norm as it has been conceived in both Indigenous and Christian traditions expects women to have multiple children and remain with their husbands through difficulty. Efuru defies both. Although heterosexual and wealthy, she is childless, devoted to Uhamiri for the rest of her life. Thus, the Efuru at the end of the novel, I argue, is queer in this African worldsense. It is not only one's status as parent or childless that shapes African queerness but also gender identity and sexual desire.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER FLUIDITY

Gender in an African worldsense is a social, rather than biological, construct. The work of Amadiume precipitated this truth before the dawn of queer theory. Gender as a social construct in Nigeria meant that wealth, ritual, labor, land, and family ties rather than genitals shaped gender identity. Amadiume wrote that women who married women, to increase their lineage and wealth, could take on the status and title of manhood. Theories of gender fluidity arising from Indigenous African cultures are not only economic, however, but spiritual. Catherine Acholonu argues this case among various Indigenous African cultures such as the Kikuyu in Kenya, the Dogon in Niger and Mali, the Fon of the Benin Republic, and the Yoruba in Nigeria.[30]

[28] Ibid., 183.
[29] Ibid., 203.
[30] Acholonu, *Motherism,* 19.

Life in Indigenous African cultures is a cycle of birth, death, and re-birth. Death is not the end, and birth is not the beginning. Negotiations are made in the spiritual realm prior to physical birth. Mercy A. Oduyoye presents a creation myth from the Ezon of southern Nigeria in which the Great Mother asked each person to choose between male and female identity. Their gender would shape their destiny. The last line of the myth reads: "[o]nly by very special religious ritual could any of this be changed."[31] This suggests two queer-like theories. First, that gender is a choice and second, that gender and destiny are alterable under certain conditions. Thus, Indigenous African knowledge makes room for gender fluidity.

Nkuzi Zandile Nkabinde was a Zulu lesbian who presented a queer South African spiritual worldsense in the publication, *Black Bull, Ancestors, and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma.* He was born December 7, 1975, and died May 24, 2018. I consider his text as the beginnings of a trans memoir because Nkabinde transitioned from female to male after its publication. I refer to Nkabinde as he, although the stories and examples from this memoir are written from the she perspective to communicate his same-gender desire and gender nonconformity. A sangoma is a traditional diviner-healer who works with the ancestors in their bloodline, community, or worldwide. Nkabinde grew up with an awareness of many spirits living inside him, as his twin brother, his grandmother and uncle all died the day he was born. Most influential was his ancestor and great uncle Nkuzi, also known as black bull. At twenty-four, Nkabinde initiated into the Zulu *Manduwu* tradition and accepted the ancestors to live inside him. He experienced changes in his personality, emotions, and behavior dependent on whether a feminine or masculine spirit was present. With Nkunzi, Nkabinde rarely menstruated, drank more alcohol, and craved sex with women. Same-gender desire and union in South Africa are not unique to Nkuzi Zandile Nkabinde. He writes that all sangomas who work with both male and female spirits express gender fluidity.[32] Dube writes that among the Nguni and Shona in Southern Africa, men who are spirit mediums act as women.[33] Thus, gender fluidity is normal and accepted among some Indigenous Southern African cultures. There are also hints of a trans imagination throughout Nkabinde's memoir, such as his declaration that he would have an operation to remove his breasts if he were

[31] Oduyoye, 23.
[32] Nkabinde, *Black Bull, Ancestors, and Me,* 73.
[33] Dube, "Postcolonial Feminist Perspective African Indigenous Religion(s)," 32.

rich.[34] He had been a tomboy since childhood. Nkunzi's possession may have influenced Nkabinde's gender transition. I imagine his trans identity as a syncretization of both cultural-religious norms and individual identification with queerness.

Sangomas marry ancestral wives, who is a person of any gender chosen by the ancestors choose to support their healing work. Sangomas and their Ancestral wives are usually women and, as in woman-woman marriages, are not expected to engage in sexual relations with the sangoma. However, the reality is far from this. When he was alive, Nkabinde sought out and conducted interviews with more than thirty same-gender desiring sangomas for the Gay and Lesbian Archives same-sex sangoma project. Nkabinde observed that "although same-sex relationships within ancestral marriages between women are supposed to be taboo, some modern sangomas are using these marriages to have secret sexual relationships in rural areas."[35] He believed ancestral marriages were always used for sexual and romantic same-gender intimacy. Nkabinde asserted that his same-gender desire was solely his own and supported by the ancestors. One of his interlocutors shared that her ancestors told her she must never have sex with men. They created a path for her that aligned with her own erotic desires. Her story also suggests that some ancestors of hers may have engaged in same-gender sexual relationships before they died.[36] Nkabinde wrote of another interlocutor, "Bongiwe's sex life is also her ancestor's sex life."[37] A sangoma must learn to control the ancestors and negotiate with them, which is to say that same-gender intimacy cannot be forced by the ancestors. It is also an expression of the sangoma's sexual orientation. The way Nkabinde writes about sexuality—"initiated into the lesbian life"—reflects Dube's assertion that the sacred and the secular are thought together in this African worldsense.[38] The queerness of sangomas is a niche example, but the work of Unoma Azuah also shows us that women

[34] Nkabinde, *Black Bull, Ancestors, and Me*, 19.

[35] Nkuzi Zandile Nkabinde, Nkabinde, Nkuzi and Ruth Morgan. "'This has happened since ancient times… it's something you are born with': ancestral wives among same-sex sangomas in South Africa." In *Tommy boys, lesbian men and ancestral wives: female same-sex practices in Africa.* edited by Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa. Johnnesburg, South Africa: Jacana Media (Pty) Ltd, 2005: 257, quoted in Ruth Morgan, "Legacy of a Lesbian Sangoma https://mg.co.za/article/2018-06-06-legacy-of-a-lesbian-sangoma/.

[36] Nkabinde, "ancestral wives among same-sex sangomas," 241.

[37] Nkabinde, *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me*, 82.

[38] Nkabinde, *Black Bull, Ancestors, and Me*, 85; Nkabinde, "ancestral wives among same-sex sangomas," 242.

who engage in same-gender romantic and sexual relationships do not have to be initiates of a spirit to be supported by them.

The water spirit manifests in many cultures of the African diaspora, and is often considered the guardian of women, femininity, and women who desire women. She may be known as lake goddess Uhamiri, as discussed in the previous section; river goddess Mami Wata, in West African and Afro-Caribbean cultures; Osun, orisha of the river and Yemoja, orisha of the ocean in Ifá; Erzulie or Lasirenn in Haitian Vodun; and river goddess Onishe among the Igbo Asaba people.[39] Onishe is a recurring presence in the memoir, *Embracing My Shadow: Growing Up Lesbian in Nigeria* by Unoma Azuah. Azuah understands the goddess to affirm her same-gender desire and gender nonconformity. Her grandmother introduced her to Igbo traditional cosmology. She taught that Onishe's "power and spirit is not fixed to a specific gender, because she is said to be androgynous in essence."[40] This is in stark contrast to the androcentric, heteronormative Christianity that Azuah was taught in Catholic boarding school and by her mother. Rather than reject Christianity, however, she integrated both the Indigenous religion of her grandmother and Christian motifs into a lesbian-affirming spiritual practice. She connected her suffering through lesbophobia with the suffering of Christ and found comfort in the syncretism of both religions.

Traditional Igbo cosmology is accommodating of this integration and of Azuah's sexual difference. After a difficult birthing experience during the height of the Biafra War, her mother took her to a traditional medicine woman, then a traditional medicine man, to look into her destiny. Dube writes that diviner-healers were and are central to African communities.[41] They are skilled in addressing illness, interpersonal disputes, solving crimes, and foretelling the future for protective measures. The medicine man told Azuah's mother what she refused to accept from the medicine woman:

> This child will neither marry a man as a life partner, nor bear children...This child belongs to the River Goddess of Oshimili: Onishe...

[39] See Randy P. Connor and David Hatfield Sparks, *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Participation in African-Inspired Traditions in the Americas* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 32-3. and Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, *Ezili's Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 11.

[40] Unoma Azuah, "Poetry, Religion, and Empowerment in Nigerian Lesbian Self-Writing," *African Journal of Gender & Religion* 25, no. 1 (2019): 161.

[41] Dube, "On Becoming Healing-Teachers of African Indigenous Religion/s," 144.

> Onishe is her guardian goddess. She is not in her life to harm her. She is a spirit child all right, but it does not end there. It is much more than that. Cutting the ties from Onishe would not change anything. She is absolute. She has not taken her life. She sustains her life…What makes your life worthwhile may not make the life of another worthwile. We can't all have the same path. This is her destiny, and you can't say it is not as good as any others.[42]

This he said in response to her grandmother's and mother's concern that only reproduction and marriage could make Azuah's life worthwhile. Again, we can see childlessness here as a form of queerness. This oracle also suggests that same-gender desire was Azuah's destiny. As Oduyoye wrote: "one's destiny are premundane choices that are unalterable."[43] The medicine man did cut Azuah's ties with Onishe upon her mother's and grandmother's request, but she continued to dream of the goddess throughout her life and resonated deeply with the element of water. As a young girl, she rejected traditional female roles, as she preferred to play rough with boys and secretly kissed other girls. Christian conservative leaders and teachers taught her shame, but through Indigenous knowledge, reading, and LGBT community cultivation, Azuah accepted herself and her sexuality.

These examples together show that same-gender desire and genderfluidity are part of an Indigenous African worldsense. The support of ancestral and water spirits means that sexual and gender identities are not just individualistic but are part of a collective cultural identity. Queerness in the African worldsense echoes the Bantu concept of Ubuntu: I am because we are, we are because I am.

CONCLUSION

Here I have shown that the African spiritual and social worldsenses that accommodate and accept same-gender union, same-gender sexual relationships, and gender fluidity. Thus, I have argued that Indigenous African practices queer heterosexuality and further queer queerness, which challenges queer studies to expand its binary universalist notions of each. Human sexuality and desire, both erotic and reproductive, do not come from oneself alone. It is influenced by the spirits and people in one's community. This is the spiritu-

[42] Unoma Azuah, *Embracing My Shadow,* 106-7.
[43] Oduyoye, 23.

ality of sexuality. Despite the imposition and assimilation of colonial religion into African cultures, Indigenous beliefs and practices also take preeminence in the everyday lives of Nigerians[44] and South Africans.[45] The globalization of LGBT thought and pride has empowered Africans like Nkuzi Zandile Nkabinde and Unoma Azuah to share their stories. They re-shape and liberate what it means to be South African and Nigerian, queer and human, and follow the call to integrate and reimagine Indigenous African practice into modern life. By looking to African knowledge—particularly queer African feminist scholarship and Indigenous cosmology—we can arrive to a more global, diverse understanding of human genders, sexualities, and identities.

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[44] Falola and Oyeniyi, *Nigeria,* 161.
[45] Dube, "Postcolonial Feminist Perspective African Indigenous Religion(s)," 23.

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Book Reviews

Konadu, Kwasi. *Many Black Women of this Fortress: Graça, Mónica and Adwoa, Three Enslaved Women of Portugal's African Empire.* London: Hurst Publishers, 2022.

Reviewed by Chad Graham, *Howard University*

From Michel-Rolph Trouillot to Saidiya Hartman, historians have commented on the task of locating African peoples within colonial archives and how essential their lack of presence is to the reproduction of history. In the midst of this, they have engaged in the systematic recovery of African women from the annals of imperialism and slavery. Their efforts to reckon with and even challenge the illegibility of their subjects within historical documents forces readers to sit with a fuller understanding of the violence visited upon African people and allows for a richer consideration of how said people pushed back against it. *Many Black Women of this Fortress* is an intervention into these ongoing conversations. A practitioner of the historical method rather than a devotee, Konadu represents the lives and worlds of three African women who toiled at the Sao Jorge da Mina Fortress in the sixteenth century to illustrate how they exerted their feminine and spiritual power in the face of oppression. Further, he offers a different sense of how to know and what can be known about the past under such circumstances.

The 1755 earthquake in Lisbon destroyed most of Portugal's royal archives. Though unfortunate, this shortage of relevant historical evidence underscores Konadu's point, that *the archive* is neither malevolent nor an instrument for the explicit erasure of knowledge about African people. It is a repository of human memory—one of many. The archival documents available don't and can't render complete portraits of who Graça, Monica, and Adwoa were what they experienced. Yet, rather than speculatively fabulate the missing pieces of the puzzle, Konadu reconstructs the divisions of the Inquisition—the empire's

juridical arm—and its accompanying actors in order to carefully detail how his subjects interfaced with the system that had them bound. As a result, he gets the most out of what is in the archive, without ruminating on what isn't.

Konadu staggers his rendering of the available historical materials with his analysis of the aspects of African culture gestures toward in the materials. An elder when she emerged into the Inquisition's purview, Graça's persistence as an enslaved, Black, and non-Christian woman somehow threatened the entire fabric of who her capturers believed themselves to be. She was charged with practicing so-called witchcraft, a crime of the highest order. By reconstructing the trial proceedings, Konadu demonstrates how the prosecution attempted to throw the proverbial (holy) book at Graça, while the defense plead her innocence due to her lack of a proper socialization into Catholicism and an ignorance in the faith which resulted.

Monica similarly stood trial for her alleged devotion to a way of knowing which resembled the ones that Europe sought to extinguish within itself. All that was known for certain is that Monica had a habit of healing herself in accordance to her people's traditions, that she had a verbal altercation with another enslaved woman, and that said woman died shortly after. By retracing the investigation and recounting the interviews, Konadu invites belief in or the possibility of the efficacy of Monica's ritual practices. There's a sense that she withheld some understanding of the cosmos which she knew not to confess to her interrogators. Reading both hers and Graça's cases engenders a desire for them both to be found not guilty; however they weren't the ones on trial. The Crown, the Inquisition, and the Church were ultimately trying to cleanse Portugal of any impurities and justify it as a holy and righteous empire. So, the truth had to be covered up and the myth had to be retold. Graça and Monica exposed this.

Adwoa did not have a judicial stage on which to unveil Portugal's insecurities. There's not even enough mention of her in the records to tell her story. However, instead of privileging the archive as the arbiter of the past, Konadu taps into repositories of Akan memory to reveal that she and the people of Adena had much more than the archive can see. Beginning with her name and transitioning to customs and protocols germane to the peoples of that region, he sketches a picture of Adwoa's personhood and how she would've navigated life near what her people—in their own language—referred to as "the large stone building." Being baptized as "Maria" wouldn't have pre-

cluded her from adhering to the taboos of being a Monday-born or the rites she was obligated to carry out according to her lineage. Shifting the focus to who Adwoa was to her people — and not who she was to somebody else — lays bare the empire's failures. The Crown, the Church, and the Inquisition could not predict, control, or discipline the people of Adena, even though it desperately tried.

Many Black Women of this Fortress locates its subjects at the heart of an empire's undoing, without presenting them as exceptional or hinging their prowess on their manipulation of outside actors. Graça, Monica, and Adwoa were everyday women. In many reso, the work is more about the circumstances that they faced than it is their triumph over them. Details about the Inquisition and the fortress's inner workings are expansive and intricate. However, Konadu weaves them around his characterizations of the three women. Further, he models the importance of African languages skills and African ways of knowing in the recovery of knowledge about said people. Otherwise, chroniclers of history risk merely interpreting what others remember about them. Konadu's methods and the sources he excavates produce a meaningful contribution to the discourse on early imperialism in Africa and the role of archives.

Sinha, Manisha. *The Rise and Fall of the Second American Republic: Reconstruction, 1860-1920.* New York: Liveright, 2024. 592pp.

Reviewed by Misa Gould, ***Florida International University***

Manisha Sinha's *The Rise and Fall of the Second American Republic: Reconstruction, 1860-1920* offers a sweeping and revisionist account of Reconstruction, extending its temporal and geographical scope beyond the South and beyond the traditional 1865–1877 framework. Sinha structures her book into four parts: The Midwife of Revolution (1860-1870), which examines the radical transformations wrought by the Civil War and the early struggles for Black citizenship; Grassroots and Reconstruction (1865-1872), which highlights the role of Freedpeople and other marginalized groups in shaping postwar democracy; American Thermidor (1870-1890), which explores the reactionary and racist backlash that dismantled Reconstruction's gains; and From Republic to Empire (1890-1920), which traces how the defeat of Reconstruction helped pave the way for U.S. imperial expansion and entrenched racial and economic hierarchies. Sinha's central argument is that Reconstruction was not merely a regional phenomenon confined to the post-Civil War South, but rather a national and even transnational struggle for interracial democracy that was ultimately crushed by the forces of racist backlash. By broadening the lens of Reconstruction historiography, Sinha places Black citizenship at the heart of American democracy while demonstrating how its defeat impacted not just Freedpeople but also Black women, workers, and Indigenous nations across the country.

One of the most significant contributions of Sinha's work is her insistence on linking Southern Reconstruction with contemporaneous struggles in the North and West. She argues that the overthrow of Reconstruction governments in the South was part of a broader pattern of reactionary backlash against democracy, a pattern that can be seen in the treatment of Native Americans, labor movements, and women's rights activists. As she states: "Where I depart from most historians of Reconstruction is in my attempt to link such developments in the South with others across the nation" (Sinha 9). By doing so, Sinha disrupts the conventional narrative that confines Reconstruction's failure to southern racial violence, instead framing it as part of a larger, national counterrevolution against the expansion of citizenship and democracy.

Sinha's exploration of Indigenous history within the Reconstruction framework is particularly striking. She draws parallels between the rhetoric used to denigrate Freedpeople and the arguments deployed against Native Americans, noting that settlers such as Daniel Grant repurposed Reconstruction-era criticisms of Black people as government "wards" to justify the subjugation of Indigenous nations (Sinha 10). This connection underscores her broader theme of the persistent tension between democracy and capitalism, in which expansionist and capitalist ambitions often triumphed over egalitarian ideals.

Another key intervention in Sinha's work is her focus on labor struggles and class conflict in the postwar period. She examines the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 and the rise of the Workingmen's Party, highlighting the backlash from conservatives who labeled these movements as foreign and dangerous, much like they had earlier dismissed Black political activism during Reconstruction (Sinha 10-11). Albert Parsons, a former Confederate who became a labor organizer, serves as a compelling figure illustrating the ideological continuity between Reconstruction-era struggles and later labor movements. As Parsons himself noted, his enemies in the South were those who oppressed Black people, while his enemies in the North were those who sought to perpetuate wage slavery (Sinha 11). In drawing these connections, Sinha expands Reconstruction's significance beyond racial justice to include broader questions of economic inequality and workers' rights.

In Part Two: Grassroots and Reconstruction (1865-1872), Sinha's concept of "grassroots Reconstruction" captures the agency of Freedpeople and other disenfranchised groups in shaping the postwar order. Freedpeople documented atrocities, pushing the federal government to intervene and shaping congressional responses to Reconstruction (Sinha 153). Their activism was instrumental in defining the era's policies, as was the participation of Black women in civic and political life. Figures like Lucy Parsons, Ellen Garrison Jackson, and Rebecca Primus highlight the intersection of gender and race in the struggle for citizenship. Sinha argues that Reconstruction was not just a battle for Black male suffrage but also an era that catalyzed the women's rights movement. She critiques simplistic narratives that portray northern white women as the primary champions of Black rights, instead centering Black women's activism in shaping a broader vision of democracy (Sinha 11-12).

As Sinha details in her third section, American Thermidor (1870-1890), she describes the collapse of Reconstruction as an extended process rather than

an abrupt event. The rise of racist domestic terrorism, combined with economic crises and political scandals, eroded national support for federal intervention in the South. Grant's second term saw increased terrorist activity against Freedpeople, culminating in what Frederick Douglass decried as the federal government's failure to protect Black voters (Sinha 317). Sinha describes the retreat from Reconstruction as a counterrevolution, emphasizing how the overthrow of Reconstruction governments in the 1870s paralleled the violent conquest of western Indian nations. The federal government's withdrawal from the South coincided with its intensified campaigns against Indigenous sovereignty, reinforcing her argument that Reconstruction's fall was intertwined with the expansion of American empire (Sinha 356-357).

By the end of the nineteenth-century, the failure of Reconstruction had set the stage for both Jim Crow in the South and aggressive U.S. imperialism abroad. Part Four: From Republic to Empire (1890-1920) examines this dichotomy as the racist thermidor that followed Reconstruction did not merely lead to the segregation and disenfranchisement of Black Americans; it also laid the ideological groundwork for US colonial ambitions in the Caribbean and the Pacific (Sinha 443-444). The rise of industrial capitalism, with its intensification of economic inequality and exploitation of immigrant labor, further entrenched the hierarchies Reconstruction had sought to dismantle. The emergence of industrial monopolies, the suppression of labor movements, and the disfranchisement of Black and Indigenous communities all signaled the triumph of reactionary forces over the democratic ideals of the Second American Republic (Sinha 399-400).

Yet, as Sinha argues, the legacies of Reconstruction endured beyond its formal demise. Women's suffrage, though delayed, was a direct outgrowth of Reconstruction's debates over citizenship and democracy. Social feminists such as Jane Addams, Lillian Wald, and Florence Kelley carried forward Reconstruction's ideals by linking labor rights, racial justice, and women's emancipation (Sinha 484). While Reconstruction's radical vision was ultimately overturned, its struggles provided a foundation for later movements, from the early twentieth-century fight for labor rights to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s—the so-called Second Reconstruction (Sinha 483).

Sinha's work is an ambitious and necessary intervention in Reconstruction historiography. By expanding Reconstruction's scope temporally and geographically, she forces readers to reconsider the broader implications of its

failure. As she asserts: "The defeat of black freedom was the defeat of American democracy" (Sinha 12)—a thesis that powerfully underscores her argument that Reconstruction's failure had ramifications far beyond the South. However, some may question whether the book's expansive approach risks diluting the specificity of Reconstruction as a distinct historical period. Nevertheless, her synthesis of race, class, gender, and empire provides a compelling framework for understanding not only the post-Civil War era but also the ongoing struggles for democracy in America. In redefining Reconstruction as a national and transnational struggle, Sinha challenges us to rethink both its achievements and its failures. More than just a story of racial progress and backlash, *The Rise and Fall of the Second American Republic: Reconstruction, 1860-1920* is a history of contested democracy, one that remains deeply relevant in our own time.

Omari Souza. *Design Against Racism: Creating Work That Transforms Communities.* Princeton Architectural Press, 2025. 256 pp.

Reviewed by Milan Drake, *Stanford University*

Omari Souza's, *Design Against Racism*, explores design as both a praxis of power and a tool for transformation. Souza picks up where he and Tedra Moses left off with *An Anthology of Blackness* (Moses & Souza, 2023), Souza keeps the conversational flame lit by taking readers on a journey through the turbulent waters, past and present, that exist within design thinking and design work—colonialism, eurocentrism, racism, gatekeeping, deniability, accessibility, and not the least of all, hope. Through the intentional selection of each contributor and his own words, Souza reminds us that intellectually examining design's very problematic past is the only way we can design a pragmatic future. With clear, purposeful storytelling, Souza illustrates how design can either reinforce exclusionary histories or actively challenge them. His approach does not center problems but possibilities, positioning design as a method for intervention and repair.

The journey of *Design Against Racism* is laid out in three themes—History, Practice, and Case Studies. Each section is a necessary component that supports Souza's case that design thinking and design work play a valuable role in communal design, communal resistance, and communal justice. This approach further supports Souza's emphasis on "storytelling as a tool" while creating a unique story of his own (p. 10). The result is a book that documents some, though not all, of the ways Black designers, allies, and advocates have shaped experiences that both reflect the world and serve as tools for reshaping it.

The first section, History, situates itself as a revolutionary record of design's existence within and resistance against racism, capitalism, and colonialism. It is not a doom and gloom conversation, but rather it is a reminder of the resilience of Black people, Black Power, and Black designers. Souza also serves as a reminder of the importance of acknowledging the hard truths of the past. The history we hug and the history we hate are a part of the healing and designing of a reality that honors our full humanity. It is necessary to acknowledge our pasts, no matter the weight of the atrocity. Yes, in hopes of not repeating it and in hopes of being able to heal the scars such atrocities have left behind.

The second section, Practice, shifts the focus to solutions—how folks have embraced design as a tool, challenged societal narratives, and created new realities, using design as a canvas to shape a broader, more inclusive vision. Designers like Dr. Lesley-Ann Noel (p. 131), Kaleena Sales, Zariah Cameron (p. 182), and Sekou Cooke (p. 168) exemplify how design shapes narratives and holds complex stories of race, class, identity, and social dynamics. One amazing example briefly highlighted in this section was the State of Black Design Conference (SOBD) in March of 2022. If I did have a critique of Souza and this book, it would be here. Souza is far too humble in the limited mentioning of SOBD and the real-life example of hush-harbor for Black designers, as well as their allies and advocates. I have experienced SOBD in person, and if there was ever a living, breathing example of *how* to practice Black Design work, SOBD is it. The gathering of Black minds in a brave, Black space was life changing.

The final section, Case Studies, is where the most tangible evidence is presented. Here Souza looks at several examples of work being done in the community that represent putting the conversations of theory into real-world action. This section acknowledges contributions that have been historically overlooked due to the racial dynamics of the designers and or the racial dynamics of the communities which they serve. Many of the case studies highlight important, yet lesser-known work, and Souza's decision to include them brings visibility to designs that would be otherwise invisible.

I can see myself returning to this book as a citation in my own work and a reference in the design spaces I frequent. Designing Spaces for Racism is a tool for design thinking, design work, and activism—creating brave spaces where culture thrives, learning is encouraged, contributions are valued, all while challenging the status quo. If the goal was to push the conversation forward on how we design against racism and provide clear examples of those who have designed against racism and examples of those who are presently designing against racism, the book delivers completely. The intention is clear, the examples are strong, and the voices included within are done so with undeniable deliberateness.

As an academic and educator, many of the names and examples in the book's early sections felt familiar. To that end, I would have liked to see more conversations centered on community designers throughout the first two themes of the book. The case studies strike a balance between the conversations hap-

pening at universities and the applied practices happening in the communities (p. 200). The case studies inspired the following questions—what if some of these examples had been woven into the Practice section? What if some of these examples had shown up earlier? That is not to say the book fell short, but when authors finally give voice to subjects that are often marginalized, there is a tendency to want more.

Another of the book's strengths is its successful balance of theory and application from the Introduction to the Conclusion. Souza does not become overly focused on praising design thinking and design work, nor does he engage in a deep exploration of the doom-and-gloom of design practice. Instead, Souza offers a range of possibilities, pathways, and praxis from past successes and lessons learned, adding to the toolkit for those of us who call ourselves designers, educators, community leaders, and academic activists.

Omari Souza delivers a powerful, well put together story that tells of Black History of the past and reminds us of the urgency to redesign and reframe our thinking for resistance and liberation in 2025. The book exemplifies the necessity for amplifying a range of voices and lays a strong foundation for others to follow suit. Reading this book had me asking myself: What's next? Who's next? What else can I design? Maybe readers of this book will find themselves asking similar questions.

Sunday Mornings at Sugarland
Samuel Sharpe (BSU '22)

Acrylic on canvas
48 in x 60 in
2024

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1865

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