

A Black Feminist Critique of Same-Race Street Harassment

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Abstract

Street harassment is a form of sexual terrorism that reminds women of their vulnerability to violent assault in public and semi-public spaces. Black women's experiences of street harassment are complicated by their race, and the race of their harasser(s). Black feminists' political vocabulary of intersectional analysis offers a useful framework for portraying the indivisibility of race and gender in black women's lives, but the extension of intersectional criticism to capture black lesbians' political vulnerability within black politics and civic life has neither been automatic nor consistent in black feminist theory. This article invokes the 2003 street harassment and subsequent murder of a black lesbian teenager by a black male assailant in Newark, NJ both to demonstrate black heterosexual women's interest-convergence with black lesbians in black civic life, and to urge black feminists to be less equivocal in holding black men responsible for their participation in black patriarchy. This requires the retrieval and redefinition of the political language of culture and behavior from black conservatives who rightly flag the associational aspects of black politics, but fail to question the gender and sexuality dynamics within these associations, and fail to perceive the interplay between civic behavior and intersecting structural inequalities such as racism, patriarchy, homophobia, and spatial poverty.

1. Introduction

At approximately three thirty in the morning of Sunday, May 11, 2003, Sakia Gunn was murdered while waiting with four friends for a bus in Newark, New Jersey. The young women were on their way home from a party in Manhattan, when according to Gunn's friends, "two men got out of a car, made sexual advances, and physically attacked them. The women fought back, and when Gunn told the men that she was a lesbian, one of them stabbed her in the chest."ⁱ Gunn was fifteen, and black. Her attacker, Richard McCullough, a twenty-nine year old black man, turned himself in to Newark police on May 15, and was arrested and charged with murder, weapons possession, and bias intimidation.ⁱⁱ In a plea bargain with prosecutors, the charge of bias murder was subsequently changed to aggravated manslaughter, and McCullough is now serving a prison term of twenty-five years or less.ⁱⁱⁱ News coverage of Gunn's murder was scant, even though scores of Gunn's classmates gathered at city hall to grieve and lend their support on the day of McCullough's arrest. Newark's Mayor Sharpe James, also black, called a press conference to publicly denounce the crime, but refused to meet with community activists to discuss bias issues. Gunn's brutal homicide failed to garner significant national attention. Black political leadership fell silent. And if not for the efforts of community activists, Gunn would have been buried in a potter's grave due to her family's poverty.^{iv}

There are many ways to interpret the reported facts of this sad event. Patricia Hill Collins offers for comparison the public outcry in 1998 over the murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay white college student in Laramie, Wyoming, as well as the bias related

beatings of Rodney King and Abner Louima.^v But the intention of this paper is not so much to raise public awareness of Gunn's murder, although that in itself is important, as it is to bring into focus the political implications raised by the way she died. Collins begins this work by observing that what ended in fatal violence began as the everyday street harassment of a group of young black women: "Like African American girls and women, regardless of sexual orientation, they were seen as approachable. Race was a factor, but not in a framework of interracial race relations."^{vi} All persons involved were black. And while it seems clear and sadly plausible that Gunn's declaration of her lesbianism precipitated her murder, Gunn's sexual identity cannot be detached and analyzed apart from her other intersecting identities of blackness, femaleness, gender expression, age, class, and place of residence. All of these vectors intersect and are indivisible.^{vii} We can never know for certain whether an alteration of one or more of these would have prevented her murder (i.e., had she not been a teenager, had she lived in a different community, had she had enough money to avoid public transportation late at night, had she not disclosed her sexual identity, had she not talked back). But even if Gunn's life had been spared, and even if the harassment had not escalated into physical violence, the everyday street harassment of black women is still politically meaningful.

Street harassment is a form of gendered intimidation that denies women equal concern and respect, and constricts their mobility.^{viii} But this denial of dignity and freedom is complicated and often overshadowed by the interpersonal nature of street harassment, and the consequent competing claims to freedom of speech and expression short of physical violation. This essay does not attempt to dissolve this tension, but instead recasts it as a useful theoretical tool for excavating and understanding the

dynamic interplay between intersecting structural inequalities and interpersonal engagement within a same-race context. We need to conceptualize this dynamism in order to imagine substantive reform of the many formal and informal associations and interactions that constitute black civic life such as the family, schools, religious institutions, as well as everyday interactions between and among persons both familiar and strange.

I build upon a rich body of black feminist theorizing, which calls our attention to intra-racial gender relations, but often fails to provide a strong normative compass for imagining solutions to insidious, privatized political problems such as gendered intimidation and violence. This theoretical incompleteness does not reflect blindness on the part of black feminists, but is instead, I suspect, largely attributable to the conservative monopolization of the political language of personal and communal responsibility. Black feminists need this political vocabulary to supplement, *not* supplant, a critical assessment of how the structural conditions of racism, patriarchy, poverty, homophobia, and spatial segregation shape interpersonal conflicts such as the one between Gunn, her friends, and McCullough. I use “structural” in the same way that Charles Mills uses “social ontology” to mean “the basic struts and girders of social reality,”^{ix} both psychological and material, that cannot be (easily) traced to specific individuals, such as media images and the cumulative effects of urban planning. But, as Clarissa Rile Hayward argues, this lack of traceable personal agency should not prevent political theorists from critically assessing state action in their debates over multiculturalism and the “politics of recognition.”^x After all, “State actors helped forge the black American ghetto through the legal institution of racial zoning during the early

part of the twentieth century, through the enforcement of racially restrictive covenants, and finally through zoning laws that, although not explicitly racially targeted, function to maintain established patterns of racial segregation.”^{xi}

What government can give to citizens in the way of recognition and affirmation, it simultaneously can and often does undermine through inattention to the structural inequalities it both creates and sustains. Gunn’s death involved the politics of interpersonal engagement within a framework of intersecting structural inequalities. I urge back feminists to explicitly recognize the theoretical interplay between these two analytical levels, and to contemplate the ways in which black lesbian embodiment affects such interplay. This requires an expansive notion of black civic life that encompasses public and private aspects of black interaction. Black patriarchal attitudes toward black women stem from structural conditions within and without black civic life, such as the pernicious stereotypes attached to black sexuality, but this genesis does not excuse or justify interpersonal mistreatment. This point is far from new or original, but it is often mired in equivocation, as black feminists try to accommodate their racial affinity with black men, and avoid conservative interpretations of their arguments.^{xii} For instance, Dierdre Davis, whose work I discuss below, lends political credence to black women’s experiences of street harassment by terming it a raced form of sexual terrorism, but does not discuss how we might combat this problem. Black conservatives do not perceive this terrorism, but I argue that their language of extra-governmental personal and communal responsibility can and should be reclaimed, redefined and recast to supplement black feminists’ structural accounts of intersectional oppression. My aim is to strengthen the normative arm of black feminist theory by highlighting this dynamism, and by using

Gunn's murder to demonstrate the interest convergence that exists between black lesbian and heterosexual women.^{xiii}

Because black feminism is a form of race-based insurgency, I begin with a critical overview of the major strands of black political thought, against which I then explicate the theoretical anatomy of black feminism. I pay particular attention to contemporary black conservatism, arguing that its political vocabulary of civic association, culture, and personal responsibility can and should be redefined and redeployed by black feminists to supplement their incisive structural accounts of black sexism. I then move on to discuss the political significance of street harassment in general, and of black women in particular. I revisit Gunn's murder to ask what theoretical difference her black lesbian embodiment made. Although black lesbians are positioned somewhat differently from black heterosexual women in black politics, I argue that their position is continuous with black patriarchal control of all black women. Black lesbians are, to borrow from Lani Guiniere and Gerald Torres' recent work, metaphorical canaries in the mine, whose political welfare sends a message to straight black women about the state of black patriarchy. It thus behooves black feminists to incorporate this interest convergence into their descriptive and prescriptive arguments.^{xiv}

2. Black Political Thought

The basic goal of all black political ideologies is to improve black life conditions. The adjective "black" thus not only refers to the racial identification of the theorist, but also to the racial focus of the theorist's arguments. Michael Dawson further explains that "the distinction between the 'contemplative' and the 'active' life has been neither a

luxury most black intellectuals could historically afford nor one that made pragmatic or philosophical sense to the activists and intellectuals who were developing, debating, codifying, and implementing the ideologies which are at the core of black political thought.”^{xv} These ideologies include black liberalism, which Dawson subdivides into radical egalitarianism and disillusioned liberalism, “the black radical tradition,” which Cedric Robinson bisects into black Marxism and black nationalism, black conservatism, which Martin Kilson categorizes into older “organic” and newer “pseudo” black conservatisms, and black feminism, which theorizes black women’s identities of race and gender as intersectional.^{xvi} Black feminists typically launch their critiques from within the black ideologies listed above, faulting them for not explicitly theorizing gender as a vector that intersects race. A consequence of this omission is that black women’s particular political interests are often under-theorized or ignored in black politics.

Dawson uses term the “black counterpublic” to describe political deliberation that occurs within black communities, between African Americans and the dominant American bourgeois public sphere, and between blacks and white oppositional publics such as the labor movement and mainstream feminism.^{xvii} Radical egalitarianism is an optimistic version of American liberalism that melds a scathing critique of American racism with optimism that a strong central state can and should correct for the moral and material injustices wrought by slavery, Jim Crow and their aftermath. Radical egalitarians such as Frederick Douglass, and W.E.B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King, Jr., during the early stages of their careers, developed moral arguments based in a literal or “textualist” interpretation of equality references found in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bible.^{xviii} As both Du Bois and King’s careers

progressed, their optimism devolved into disillusioned liberalism, as both men concluded that racism was not an anomalous departure from the course of American liberalism, but was instead deeply ensconced in the economic and psychological structures of American liberalism, as practiced by the white majority.^{xix} Disillusioned liberalism does not, however, abandon appeals to the state, nor does it forfeit the goal of racial justice. Instead, disillusioned black liberals perceive white racism as a much more formidable obstacle to black progress than the adherents of radical egalitarianism had predicted.

Black feminists subscribe to the racial pragmatism of disillusioned liberalism, but take black liberals to task for not explicitly acknowledging gender as an intersecting force that disadvantages black women in specific ways. While many of black women's political concerns coincide with those of black men (e.g., voting and fair housing), black women also experience sexism in interpersonal settings that black liberals treat as private, and thus beyond their analytical reach. For example, the emphasis of black liberal civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and the National Urban League has been mostly to combat public forms of racism through government intervention in resource distribution and public policies aimed at eradicating formal or state-sponsored racism.^{xx} Privacy is important, but it can also leave black women without a political vocabulary for articulating their experiences of interpersonal intimidation and abuse. I do not advocate using public policy directly to address intra-racial street harassment, but instead push for seeing this problem as worthy of public discussion and remediation within a broadened sense of black civic life.

Whereas black liberals call for state intervention to correct for residual racial inequities in education, employment and housing, black radicalism perceives racism as

infesting the state itself. Racism can neither be eradicated nor attenuated via law, public policy, or interpersonal effort. Black Marxists use Marx's descriptive model of dialectical struggle to expose U.S. capitalism's exploitation of blacks, but they see race rather than economic class as the dominant axis of exploitation. Charles Mills argues that black Marxism differs from "socialist feminism" in that blacks must critique the social system of "white supremacy" from an external position of non-personhood or "natal alienation."^{xxi} Race, for Mills, is the primary contradiction, not gender.^{xxii} He theorizes, "Race as the central identity around which people close ranks (no transracial gender bloc; no transracial class bloc; but transgender and transclass racial blocs.) Race as the stable reference point for identifying the "them" and "us" which override all other "thems" and "us's" (identities are multiple, but some are more central than others). Race as the best predictor of opinion on a myriad of public issues. Race as what ties the system together, and blocks progressive change."^{xxiii} Not all black feminists share Mills's Marxist leaning, but most diagnose the intersection of racism and sexism as systemic, rather than anomalous.

The problem with black Marxism, from a black feminist perspective, is that its centering of raced structure threatens to subordinate black sexism by treating it as epiphenomenal. During her involvement with the Communist Party, Angela Davis tried to make black Marxism more observant of black women's intersectional experiences of racial oppression by reminding her fellow black Marxists that reproduction and family organization were central to Marx and Engels's historical materialism. Social movements must therefore be judged by their ability to improve the lives of black women, "the most oppressed sector of society."^{xxiv} Davis's more recent critique of the

modern prison industry's disproportionate incarceration and abuse of black women provides a much-needed macro analysis, but does not explicitly investigate micro-level interpersonal, intra-racial dynamics.^{xxv} Mills tries to incorporate black feminist epistemology into his black Marxism: "An account of social subordination that does not draw on the experiences of women and blacks is simply theoretically weaker than one that does."^{xxvi} But whether the dialectical structure of black Marxism can be stretched to accommodate multiple oppressions without breaking its Marxist integrity of top-down class dominance is questionable.

Black nationalists use the rhetoric of "nation" to stress the need for black communal self-sufficiency, but are diverse in their ideas of what a black nation should entail. Black nationalists run the gambit from those who advocate physical and psychological return to Africa, to the creation of geographically distinct black nations within the United States, to those who support cultural Pan-Africanism in its various guises.^{xxvii} As with black Marxism, black nationalists offer a macro structural critique of American racism. Racism is an integral feature of American nationalism, and is therefore intractable. Many black nationalists predicate their ideas of black liberation upon patriarchal definitions of family that exclude and denigrate lesbians and gay men, while relegating black women, who are assumed to be heterosexual, to care work such as reproduction and domestic labor.^{xxviii} E. Frances White criticizes Molefi Kete Asante's Afrocentricity along these lines, but lauds the "strengths of nationalist ideology in its counterattack against racism."^{xxix}

In contrast to black liberalism and black radicalism, black conservatism and black feminism, the two least popular black ideologies among contemporary African

Americans, offer a political vocabulary for theorizing the privatized dimensions of black civic life, albeit with very different motivations, definitions and results.^{xxx} As Patchen Markell points out, political theory is well suited for investigating and challenging “the lucidity of the background vocabulary in which we represent, to ourselves and to each other, the nature of the political problems we face, the stakes of the decisions we confront, and the range of possibilities we possess.”^{xxxix} Black feminists’ introduction of the term “intersectionality” into academic and legal debates is a case in point. Black conservatives’ political vocabulary of personal and communal responsibility *could* aid the normative power of black feminists’ intersectional analyses, but black conservatives fail to investigate intra-racial power disparities between and among black men and women as they interact within the various associations that comprise black civic life. Residual racial disadvantage, according to most black conservatives, is limited to economic disparity, which they link to the putative anti-social behavior of the black urban poor.^{xxxii} Behavioral change is needed, black conservatives argue, before blacks can take advantage of the formal equal opportunities that exist within American capitalism.^{xxxiii}

Black conservatives direct our attention to the informal associations of black civic life, but fail to investigate the internal gender and sexual dynamics of these associations. Glenn Loury, for instance, articulates a hazy set of moral directives for black civic reform: “Dealing with behavioral problems; with community values; with the attitudes and beliefs of black youngsters about responsibility, work, family, and schooling are not things government is well suited to do. The teaching of ‘oughts’ properly belongs in the hands of private voluntary associations: churches, families, neighborhood groups.”^{xxxiv} Even the ostensible bad cultural habits of black middle class youth can be

traced to their mimicking of a depraved poor and working class black culture of “victimology” that devalues education, hard work, and self-reliance, in the opinion of John McWhorter.^{xxxv} Lounsbury and McWhorter are not wrong for searching beyond government action for the improvement of black life conditions. But their descriptive and prescriptive arguments concerning black culture lack critical attention to issues of intra-racial gender and sexual equality. Who determines which “oughts” ought to be taught, and how? To ignore the intersectional aspects of black civic life is to sanction, by default, status quo black patriarchal norms that tolerate and promote the mistreatment of black women.

The fuzzy portrait of black civic life painted by black conservatives provides rich ground for black feminist criticism. For it is precisely in the “interstices” of black civic life that political problems such as street harassment are trivialized and dismissed.^{xxxvi} Black liberalism and black radicalism, as sketched above, do not direct our attention to these interstices. Black conservatives lead us to the associative aspects of black life wherein much of black women’s political vulnerability lies, but they fail to connect individual behaviors such as McCullough’s street harassment and murder of Gunn to systemic issues of black patriarchy. To be clear, I am *not* arguing that the aspirations of black conservatives and black feminists are compatible. My argument, simply put, is that black conservatives’ lack of intra-associational critique gives black feminists a wide and important target for strengthening their normative resolve.

Black conservatives’ advocacy of free-market libertarianism based in the presentism of economic transaction, rather than historical remediation, fails to capture patriarchy, which is by definition historical.^{xxxvii} Black conservatives would likely

condemn Gunn's murder, but they would not view it as evidence of a historical system of sexual terrorism that compromises black women's personal security and freedom. The only critical lens offered by black conservatism onto Gunn's murder and the street harassment that preceded it is the vague, bourgeois model of a "politics of respectability" rooted in traditional, patriarchal, and mostly Christian values.^{xxxviii} On this view, McCullough's street harassment of Gunn and her friends can be seen as a breach of black civic decorum (interpersonal and cultural), but not as evidence of black patriarchy (structural and historical). This shallow sense of history in which blacks no longer face formidable structural impediments is a politics without blame. Loury exemplifies this black conservatism when he argues that we have a collective moral "responsibility for such situations as the contemporary plight of the urban black poor, and to understand them in a general way as a consequence of an ethically indefensible past (This is not so much to 'compensate' for an ethnically troubled past as to adopt the 'right interpretation' of it.) Such a commitment would, on this view, be open-ended and not contingent on demonstrating any specific lines of causality."^{xxxix} Shelby Steele echoes Loury's presentism in his rebuke of race-based compensation: "The concept of historic reparation grows out of man's need to impose a degree of justice on the world that simply does not exist. Suffering can be endured and overcome, it cannot be repaid. Blacks cannot be repaid for the injustice done to the race, but we can be corrupted by society's guilty gestures of repayment."^{xl}

But street harassment is not a behavior that is limited to the black urban poor. It is a tool of sexual domination available to all men in any venue, as any woman can attest. It is thus a democratic condition of male embodiment. The economic idiom of black

conservatives' free market libertarianism cannot explain this messier, more diffuse sense of culture. Moreover, "the conservatives who maintain that persistent poverty in the inner city is the result of some cultural deficiency, have garnered so much opposition from many liberals and radicals that few scholars are willing even to discuss culture."^{xli} The trope of cultural dependency is also deeply gendered, as "the problems associated with the behaviorally focused 'underclass' are predominantly identified with [black] females." Stereotypes of black women as hypersexual and hyper-fecund that circulate throughout the dominant American public sphere also circulate within black civic life, and affect intra-racial gender and sexual politics.^{xlii} As mothers, black women are blamed for perpetuating intergenerational poverty by bearing too many children at too young an age, and for failing to impart the proper moral and cultural values to their children.^{xliii} Compulsory heterosexuality undergirds all of these stereotypes of black cultural dysfunction, as well as their remediation.^{xliv}

But this definition of culture is not final. Robin Kelley notes that "*structuralists* implicitly focus on black problematic culture; the only difference is that they blame economic conditions for black poverty and behavior, whereas conservative *culturalists* blame individual and group behavior for a morally bankrupt 'culture of poverty' [my emphasis]."^{xlv} But both culturalists and structuralists get it wrong. We cannot understand black women's intra-racial political injuries unless we detach culture from poverty and begin to talk about behaviors such as street harassment as pervasive. Black feminists can and should initiate this process, and our first step should be to retrieve the political language of culture, and infuse it with a critical awareness of how personal decisions can alleviate and exacerbate black patriarchy in the everyday experiences of

black civic life. That said, I do not want to underestimate the risks associated with reconstituting the language of cultural and behavioral critique. Cornel West was harshly criticized by race scholars on the left, for using the term “nihilism” to portray cultural practices within black communities that are self-harming. Seizing on the danger of conservative co-optation, most of West’s detractors failed to appreciate his macro argument that misogyny and homophobia among African Americans are interpersonal behaviors linked to structures of consumerism, especially its promise of instant gratification.^{xlvi} Perhaps one way for black feminists to avoid this pitfall is to be even more deliberate than West in articulating a definition of culture that is structurally grounded, yet interpersonally sensitive. The word “culture” seized from conservative spin refers to patterned behavior. Black feminist theory exposes street harassment as a clear instance of patterned behavior that structures black civic life. I now turn to a fuller explication of black feminism’s theoretical anatomy.

3. Black Feminism

Three core elements structure all black feminist arguments: 1. an intersectional analysis of at least race and gender, 2. the positioning of community at the analytic forefront of theory and practice, and 3. attention both to the historical and contemporary experiences of black women as evidentiary. Black feminism is also “a practical ideology that is centered on insurgency; black women must define themselves and their agenda not as separatists, but as vital members of multiple communities.”^{xlvii} Black feminists’ inconsistency in explicitly incorporating diverse sexual and gender identities into their portrayal and analyses of black female subordination is indicative of the wider sense that

to be black, a woman, and gay/queer all at once is simply too much to fathom. If black women (presumed to be heterosexual) are metaphorical mules of the world, as Zora Neal Hurston declared, then where does that leave black lesbians such as Gunn and her friends?^{xlviii} Gunn challenged her assailant's power by talking back, and communicating, both in words and personal presentation, patent sexual disinterest in men. Her rejection of black heterosexual norms seems precipitous but as noted at the outset, we can never know in what measure. Black feminism's intersectional framework *can* model this intersectional integrity, but attention to the ways in which sexuality and gender expression intersect race and sex has been neither consistent nor automatic.

The potential for black feminism to capture Gunn's intersectional integrity is latent within Deborah King's trope of multiplication, which she both deploys as an amendment to black singular racial politics, and to aggregative social and legal models of discrimination that treat race and gender at discrete and insular.^{xlix} Multiplication conveys the intuitive and experiential sense that black women's oppression exceeds the sum of their constitutive identities. But King's multiplicative model does not explicitly include diverse sexuality and gender expression.¹ Instead, King briefly notes that "others [such as Barbara Smith and Audre Lorde] have suggested that heterosexism or homophobia represents another significant oppression that should be included as a third or perhaps fourth jeopardy."^{li} This equivocation is consistent with Collins's observation that black feminists have tended to de-emphasize sexual identity to a greater extent than have white feminists.^{lii} Black women are of course not the only group with multiple, intersecting identities. But black women's existential, political, and legal bifurcation is more obvious than that of many other groups because race (read: blackness) and sex

(read: femaleness) have evolved legally, politically and socially as two discrete, definitive paradigms for the detection and remediation of invidious discrimination.^{liii}

Black feminism takes root in this paradigmatic bifurcation. And it is from this position of race-based insurgency that I urge black feminists to consider their interest convergence with black lesbians. Gunn's murder, if we are to confront its systemic features, can make black lesbian embodiment familiar to heterosexual black women by reminding them that they too are disciplined to stay within the narrow confines of a tenuous ideal of black womanhood that is largely predicated upon being sexually available to black men. This means exuding black femininity in the right measure, in the right way, at the right time or risk being seen by others as too available and thus a whore, or not available enough and thus a man-hating dyke. Ideals of black femininity differ in some respects from white feminine ideals, but all feminine ideals are unstable and elusive. Efforts to master such ideals are asymptotic at best. Hence, the epithets of "whore" and "dyke" are disciplinary tools that need not correspond to a woman's self-identification or "true" identity.

Collins highlights the intersectional aspects of Gunn's murder, but does not explicitly identify the interest convergence between black lesbians and black heterosexual women. The notion is nonetheless embryonic in her description of black women's "situated standpoint" as a structural location, rather than as something that determines black women's subjective experiences. The critical impetus driving black feminism is "that African-American women have a shared (though not uniform) location in hierarchical power relations in the United States."^{liv} One might counter that the differences among black women such as sexuality, national origin, religion, age, region,

and class attenuate the political significance of a shared black female standpoint. Such differences do strain the tethers of black female political cohesion, but black feminists defend the sturdiness of such a standpoint by emphasizing the immutability of racial and sexual ascription, and the ways in which these classifications shape the set of choices that all black women encounter as they navigate their individual identities.^{lv} As Collins phrases it, “Within unjust power relations, groups remain unequal in the powers of self-definition and self-determination.”^{lvi}

Interest-convergence between black lesbian and heterosexual women does not, however, erase black lesbians’ experiential particularity within black politics. The rules governing black female sexual and gender performance circulate within black civic life, and constrict every black woman’s personal expression and mobility. But black lesbian desire and expression render their performance of raced gender more self-conscious because of the personal knowledge that one is blatantly bucking black civic norms. Black lesbians must make situational decisions about whether to try to pass for straight, or to “come out.” This internal sense of transgression can create what David Richards portrays as a “psychic ghetto of the mind,” which affects, but does not predetermine one’s experiences of street harassment.^{lvii} Gunn could have been killed if she hadn’t disclosed her sexuality, just as soon as if she hadn’t. And many black heterosexual women who try to perform their gender and sexuality in the right way have been assaulted or killed in what started as seemingly innocuous street harassment. The rules for testing women’s sexual vulnerability shift under the asymmetrical power of the harasser. And in this very basic sense, the fates of black heterosexual women are tied to

those of black lesbians and all gender and sexual nonconformists within black communities.

4. The Politics of Street Harassment

Before envisioning pragmatic solutions to the problem of intra-racial street harassment, we must first explicate in greater detail the political significance of this all too common practice. What is the harm involved in street harassment, and what difference did Gunn's black female lesbian embodiment make? Dierdre Davis offers a trenchant critical assessment of black women's experiences of street harassment, but does not consider how black lesbians' experiences of street harassment might differ from those of black heterosexual women. Putting a twist on Betty Friedan's description of the psychological, physical, and existential ailments afflicting white middle-class women living in the suburban isolation of post-WWII America as "the problem that has no name," Davis characterizes street harassment of women as the harm that has no name. The power to name one's experiences is a central theme across the ideological spectrum of Second Wave feminism, a social and academic movement that has generally endeavored to bring into public light women's privatized experiences of sex-based oppression. Instead of trying to specify the content of street harassment, Davis describes the "mechanics of street harassment" as characterized by "the locale; the gender of and the relationship between the harasser and the target; the unacceptability of 'thank you' as a response; and the reference to body parts."^{lviii} And just as feminists have named issues such as date and marital rape, and sexual harassment in the workplace and schools as a way of politicizing them, Davis makes the case that using the language of "sexual

terrorism” to describe the verbal and non-verbal intimidation of women by men in public venues is a vital feminist project.

Sexual terrorism is an apt description of street harassment. As a woman you know it will happen, but you never know for certain when or how it will happen. This makes street harassment hard to define, and difficult to combat. Its insidiousness derives in large measure from its venue: the semi-private, semi-public everyday occurrence of walking, sitting, or standing along city streets, or other public spaces such as parks and shopping malls. Its regulation raises obvious First Amendment issues of free speech and expression, which makes it seem like just another female burden to be endured. Most girls first experience street harassment by boys and men at or even before puberty, and thus learn to see their bodies as sources of sexual danger; their sexual vulnerability to boys and men becomes an inescapable and constant condition of being female, a liability to be managed privately rather than discussed and remedied publicly.^{lix} Indeed, it is the banality of street harassment that makes it so effective in maintaining a larger system of sexual terrorism.^{lx} Citing previous feminist work on defining sexual violence, Dierdre Davis argues that violence should be viewed as “a continuum of behavior in which street harassment must be placed if we are to understand the depth and pervasiveness of sexual terrorism.” The point is not to prove a causal connection between street harassment and physical assault, but rather to acknowledge that street harassment “reminds women of their vulnerability to violent attack in American urban centers, and to sexual violence in general.”^{lxi} Unless the harasser’s remarks and/or gestures lead to a physical assault, most women “transform the pain into something else, such as, for example, punishment, or flattery, or transcendence, or unconscious pleasure.”^{lxii}

5. Black Embodiment

It is only retrospectively, as in the stabbing to death of Gunn, that street harassment enters the radar screen as a likely precursor and escalator of violent assault. And if we are to understand the political significance of Gunn's murder, we must also look within a larger system of American sexual terrorism for the particular social meanings that are attached to black female and male embodiment.^{lxiii} All black women, regardless of sexual and gender identity, are vulnerable to the dichotomous stereotypes of wanton sexual access (the prostitute or Jezebel) and asexual maternity (the mammy), both of which are predicated upon presumed heterosexuality. These stereotypes must be understood not as free-floating epithets, but as having deep historical roots in the laws and social customs that justified the economic and political institutions of slavery, legal segregation, as well as the administration of public policies related to health, welfare, and criminal justice.^{lxiv} Davis's argument is not that all black women experience street harassment in the same way, but rather that all black women are susceptible to the stereotypes that have been historically attached to black female embodiment.^{lxv} "Street harassment forces African American women to realize that the ideologies of slavery still exist."^{lxvi}

That this history underlies white men's street harassment of black women is intuitive, but what are we to make of black men's street harassment of black women? Davis argues that when black men harass black women they seek "the position of whiteness" occupied by white men. Citing bell hooks, she concludes that the futility of

these efforts means that “‘men of color are not able to reap the material and social rewards for their participation in patriarchy. In fact they often suffer from blindly and passively acting out a myth of masculinity that is life-threatening. Sexist thinking blinds them to this reality. They become victims of the patriarchy.’”^{lxvii} I agree that racism prevents black men from fully participating in white patriarchy, but I disagree that black men are victims of that patriarchy. For although black men suffer under the weight of racial stereotypes that constrict their lives in myriad ways, they also reap psychological and material rewards for perpetuating black patriarchal practices such as street harassment. I am not suggesting that Davis intends for the term “victim” to exonerate black men who street harass, but I do think that her use of the term hinders frank discussion about personal and communal responsibility among African Americans, thus illustrating the normative equivocation of black feminism flagged earlier. In the end, Davis offers no prescription other than to re-state the importance of using the language of sexual terrorism to legitimate black women’s experiences of street harassment, and the implicit daunting sense that nothing short of deep structural revolution (i.e., the evisceration of slavery’s residual effects) can ameliorate this problem.

We can acknowledge that black men’s relationship to patriarchy is complicated by race, without depicting them as victims. The stereotype of black men as sexual predators, especially of white women, has historically rendered black men the targets of lynching, and other forms of punishment, humiliation, and surveillance: witness the objectification of the black male body in sport, advertising, and entertainment. Indeed, “One of the greatest inventions of the twentieth century is the African-American male—‘invented’ because black masculinity represents an amalgam of fears and projections in

the American psyche which rarely conveys or contains the trope of truth about the black male's existence."^{lxviii} But black men also have the power and social space to assert their dominance over black women through monitoring and objectification. Collins underscores this point, maintaining that, "because women often find themselves in close proximity to men [for a variety of reasons], gender relies more heavily on surveillance and other inclusionary strategies of control targeted toward the proximate other."^{lxix}

Intra-racial street harassment exemplifies such inclusionary control. Gunn and her friends were proximate to their assailants largely because of the spatial segregation of black poverty in Newark. Their youth likely contributed to their vulnerability by making them seem more approachable; an older group of women might have been quicker to sense the violent potential of the encounter; with more life experience, they might have been better equipped to diffuse the situation before it turned violent. But none of that gets to the political salience of street harassment, which is its predictable unpredictability. Gunn's decision to banter with McCullough was likely imprudent, but it does not mitigate McCullough's performance of a deeply problematic assertion of black masculine agency based in the control of black women. When black men sexually terrorize black women they recycle painful stereotypes of black sexuality that are historically grounded. They make decisions to participate in a raced patriarchy that accords them the space and power to intimidate, shame, and humiliate black women. And just as rape is not about sex, street harassment is not about flirtation or courtship. Both acts are meant to assert male dominance over women in situations where women appear vulnerable, and both leave psychological wounds on women's lives that are rarely tended to, let alone acknowledged.^{lxx}

The lack of publicity surrounding Gunn's murder sends the chilling message that black lesbians remain unseen, "ungrievable,"^{lxxi} and expendable within and without black civic life.^{lxxii} To grieve for someone, even a stranger, requires compassion, which in turn requires some degree of familiarity and identification, as in: "There go I but for the grace of God." Jackie Bishop recounts her personal identification with Gunn, "I know this girl...I know what [it] is like to be young and gay and scared, and full of bravado, wondering, always wondering if someone will try to hurt me. More than 20 years later, I know what it is like to see my sisters, my daughters, walk the same streets I did, trying to find their way home."^{lxxiii} Gunn's murder is deeply personal for those who loved her as well as for those who could identify with her. But her story also took place within a depersonalized political framework of a non-intersectional black politics that renders black lesbians particularly vulnerable. Cathy Cohen uses the term "cross-cutting issues" to theorize this political vulnerability: "The concept of cross-cutting political issues refers to those concerns that *disproportionately and directly* affect only certain segments of a marginal group. These issues stand in contrast to consensus issues, which are understood to constrain or oppress with equal probability (although through different manifestations) all identifiable marginal group members."^{lxxiv}

Compassion also hinges on individual and collective moral judgment. Is this person my moral equivalent?^{lxxv} Cross cutting issues tend to be "situated among those subpopulations of marginal communities that are the most vulnerable economically, socially, and politically, and whose vulnerable status is linked to narratives that emphasize the 'questionable' moral standing of the sub-population."^{lxxvi} It may seem like a foregone conclusion that black feminists would be attentive and sympathetic to Gunn's

intersecting identities, whereas black conservatives would denounce Gunn's murder while simultaneously finding Gunn's transgression of black heterosexual feminine norms deplorable. Yet, social conservatism on homosexuality and gender roles is pervasive across the black ideological spectrum, and not the sole preserve of black conservatives.^{lxxvii} This is not to suggest that hierarchies of power within black politics that marginalize black lesbians are not deeply intertwined with dominant white U.S. culture. Nor do I mean to imply that street harassment is a black problem; it is of course pervasive throughout U.S. society, and indeed throughout most of the world. But Gunn's murder, and the harassment that preceded it, raise pointed issues of intra-racial gender and sexuality dynamics within black civic life that can and should be central to black feminism.

6. Race-Based Insurgency

The racial context in which black feminists develop their arguments is what I have been referring to as black civic life. My conception of black civic life is discursive, geographical, physical and metaphysical. It includes formal and informal political discourse, action, and contemplation across a range of expected and unexpected venues, and black communal existence both spatially and metaphysically (i.e., both those residing within and without predominately black geographical settings). Discursive accounts of black politics are helpful, but can blind us to alternative forms of political communication such as bodily intimidation and psychological conditioning, both of which can conspire to inhibit black women from articulating and discussing the harms they incur within the privatized zones of black civic life. A better understanding of these harms requires an

elastic conception of black community and black politics. To understand why black feminist arguments should be anchored in this expansive conception of black civic life requires further explanation of the political meaning of race. Race does not take priority over gender in the theoretical structure of black feminism, but it does provide the overarching framework for black feminists' insurgency. This final section attempts to explicate this nuance of black feminism, in order to further elucidate the political significance of the way Gunn died.

How do black feminists interpret Dawson's finding that "many African Americans' political perceptions are shaped by the belief that their individual life chances are linked to the fate of the race?"^{lxxviii} Race, for black feminists, is an overarching system under which black women's other identities are subsumed, but not subordinated. Naomi Zack attributes this to the "American sexualization of race," which originated in the economic enterprise of slavery, and singled out black women's sexuality for control and censure: "there seems to be no historical precedent for the sexualization of race in the United States, that is, no earlier cultural example of the assignment of a debased form of sexuality to an hereditary caste, over generations."^{lxxix} Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham marshals historical evidence to support the idea that race structures black women's other identities: "By continually expressing overt and covert analogic relationships, race impregnates the simplest meanings we take for granted." As a "metalanguage," Higginbotham argues that race functions "to subsume other sets of social relations, namely gender and class" while it simultaneously "blurs and disguises its own complex interplay with the very social relations it envelops."^{lxxx} This gets to what Mills calls "the

phenomenological dimension of a racialized existence, the centrality of racial identity, the extent to which race penetrates to one's ontic bones."^{lxxxix}

This enveloping sense of racial existence does not deter black feminists from pushing for reforms within existing political and legal paradigms. But it does complicate black feminists' relationships with black men. Pragmatism requires a multi-pronged approach to problem solving that neither alienates black men as potential allies, nor excuses their participation in black patriarchy. In the 1980s, Alice Walker and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi re-introduced the term "womanism," into black feminist theory as an alternative label under which black women and men could, together, develop more holistic approaches to fostering racial and sexual justice founded upon mutual empathy and mutual interest.^{lxxxii} Yet, we cannot assume that the elasticity of black feminist or womanist theories will automatically encompass the specific concerns of marginalized members of black communities such as Gunn and her friends.^{lxxxiii} Nor can we be certain that black feminists' efforts to work in coalition with black men will not enervate their normative calls for cultural reform within black civic life.

Audre Lorde's scholar-activism epitomizes an ideal of this normative coalition building. Her legacy to black feminist theory is the precept that substantive humanism can only be achieved through the recognition and appreciation of differences, and never through the suppression of difference under a superficial banner of universality. Lorde implores us, as perhaps only a poet can, to take full critical stock of the multiple differences within ourselves and within others. Our identities are more numerous and unruly than most of us let on: "Those of us who stand outside [the *mythic norm* of white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure] often identify one way

in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing.”^{lxxxiv} In stretching human difference to its logical conclusion: pluralistic humanism, Lorde inspires self-examination and interpersonal learning. These are worthy aims, but difficult to translate into the categorical language of law and politics.

A pragmatist must deal with translation. Among contemporary black feminists, those working within the scholar-activist movement of critical race theory have been the most attentive to the pragmatic implementation of intersectional race-based insurgency. In response to the retrenchment of race-based government aid set in motion during the 1980s, legal scholars such as Kimberle Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Paula Cauldwell, Judy Scales-Trent, and Kendall Thomas have used intersectional analysis to show the limits of liberal legal reforms, and the consequent need for additional grassroots political activism outside of the law.^{lxxxv} Most critical race theorists postulate that race is a permanent structural feature of U.S. society, but simultaneously call for “radical” reforms such as revamping law school pedagogy, the style and content of legal scholarship, and the legal reasoning used by judges to adjudicate court cases involving racial discrimination.^{lxxxvi} These models provide a starting point for imagining pragmatic attitudinal and behavioral change within black civic life, but solutions to same-race street harassment require that we reach even further beyond formal politics to critically consider everyday interpersonal conduct within black civic life.

7. Conclusion

The first step toward changing attitudes about street harassment within black civic life is to recognize it as a form of raced sexual terrorism that structures, but does not determine interpersonal behavior. That is to say, black men have choices about whether or not to participate in black patriarchal practices such as street harassment, and black women have choices about how best to educate black men about the political significance of this seemingly innocuous practice. There are specific “oughts” that ought to be taught within black families, schools, churches, and community organizations concerning the treatment of black girls and women within black civic life, and black feminists should not equivocate on this. Chief among these “oughts” is for boys and men to understand the psychological and existential harms they inflict when they participate in a longstanding culture of street harassment, and for black girls and women not to dismiss these harms as trivial. Street harassment is about testing women’s sexual vulnerability, even when the harasser is not fully cognizant of this testing. I have focused on black same-race street harassment not because it is better or worse than other racial configurations, but because black men’s street harassment of black women involves a race-specific form of gendered intimidation that poses unique challenges to black feminists who are at pains not to alienate black men in their political engagement with racial “consensus issues.”^{lxxxvii}

Admittedly, I am asking black feminists to walk a fine line between holding black men responsible for intra-racial gendered intimidation and side stepping the pitfall of feeding dominant stereotypes of black culture as nothing more than negative and pathological. But this balancing effort is vital. The alternative is for black feminists such as Deirdre Davis to have the force of their incisive theoretical accounts of black women’s

political injuries blunted by silence about what individual black men and women can and should do in the face of intersecting structures of racism, patriarchy, homophobia, and spatially segregated poverty. To do this, I have urged black feminists to reclaim the political vocabulary of culture and behavior from black conservatives and infuse these terms with the amended black feminist epistemology described herein. In this way, I hope to draw out the prescriptive power I find nascent in black feminist intersectional theory.

This normative potential requires explicit recognition of the interest convergence between black heterosexual women and black lesbians. Legal and social customs of “compulsory heterosexuality” both marginalize black lesbians such as Gunn and her friends within the context of black civic life, and in the broader American public sphere. We cannot understand Gunn’s slaying without taking into account the commingling of patriarchy and homophobia within the cultural, spatial, and class context of black urban life. Ironically, black feminists who fail to explicitly address sexuality and gender expression in their intersectional theorizing do so to the detriment of heterosexual black women because, as I have argued, homophobia and gender essentialism within black civic life constrict the freedom of all black women.^{lxxxviii} When black women suffer discrimination, intimidation, and violence, the ethical principle of equal opportunity at the heart of American liberalism is compromised. Additionally, the social utility of black communities, and that of the broader American society, is diminished when black women, in all of their diversity, must live under conditions of sexual terrorism.

These connections must be made if black feminist theory is to produce tangible reforms in black civic life. This work requires clarification of the strengths and

weaknesses of contemporary black feminist theory. I have tried to initiate this work through a critical comparison of how black feminists and black conservatives might interpret the street harassment and murder of Sakia Gunn. The most salient theoretical difference between these two black ideologies lies not in homophobia, but rather in the depth of historical description, and in the perception of *how* black civic associations can and should promote social change. Kimberle Crenshaw's critical race theoretical account of the First Amendment rights of misogynist rappers in the 1980s and early 90s, raises similar nettlesome issues pertaining to regulation and censorship, especially the selective censorship of black men. In its place, Crenshaw calls for the development of a "Black feminist sensibility," which acknowledges "that patriarchy is a critical issue that negatively impacts the lives of not only African-American women, but men as well...Although collective opposition to racist practice has been and continues to be crucially important in protecting Black interests, an empowered Black feminist sensibility would require that the terms of unity no longer reflect priorities premised upon the continued marginalization of Black women."^{lxxxix}

Street harassment indicates a sexual imbalance of power that is connected to broader systems of patriarchy, racism, and homophobia. This is what black conservatives miss in their presentist accounts of an urban black culture of poverty. Black conservatives are not entirely wrong to signal the need for cultural change, but such cultural change must go hand in hand with critical inquiry into the social and economic structuring of U.S. society as it impacts black civic life, as well serious investigation of the gender and sexual dynamics that comprise black civic associations. Black feminists have begun this important work, but must not lose sight of the particular social and

political vulnerability of black lesbians and gender nonconformists such as Sakia Gunn within and without black communities. Their lives depend on it.

ⁱ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 114.

ⁱⁱ Felonies motivated by racial or sexual bias in New Jersey carry heftier penalties.

ⁱⁱⁱ Post Wire Services, "Lesbian's Killer In Plea Deal," *The New York Post* (March 5, 2005) Metro section, p. 11.

^{iv} Ronald Smothers, "Man Arrested in the Killing of a Teenager in Newark," *New York Times* (May 16, 2003).

^v Recent allegations that Shepard was not specifically targeted and killed because he was gay raise questions about the accuracy with which bias motivation can be proved. Andrew Sullivan acknowledges that lesbians and gay men are subject to intimidation and violence, but argues that hate crime laws are misguided because all murder is motivated by hate. Taking a "tough skin" approach, Sullivan rhetorically asks, "And why is hate for a group worse than hate for a person? In Laramie, Wyo., the now-famous epicenter of 'homophobia,' where Matthew Shepard was brutally beaten to death, vicious murders are not unknown." "What's So Bad about Hate?" *New York Times Magazine* (September 26, 1999), section 6, page 51, column 2.

^{vi} Collins, 115.

^{vii} "...I am asserting that the experience of black women must be seen as multiplicative, multilayered, indivisible whole, symbolized by the equation one times one, *not* one plus one." Adrien Wing, "Brief Reflections toward a Multiplicative Theory and Praxis of Being" in Wing (ed.) *Critical Race Feminism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997): 27-34, 32.

^{viii} These general principles are at the heart of egalitarian liberalism. See for example, Ronald Dworkin, *Life's Dominion: An Argument about Abortion and Euthanasia* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), and John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

^{ix} Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 44. See also the definition of “institutional racism” in Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power: the politics of liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967).

^x For an overview of the initial debate see Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), edited by Amy Gutmann, with commentary by Kwame Anthony Appiah, Jurgen Habermas, Stephen Rockefeller, Michael Walzer, and Susan Wolf. For recent critical essays, see Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (New York: Verso, 2003).

^{xi} Clarissa Rile Hayward, “The Difference that States Make: Democracy, Identity, and the American City,” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 97, no. 4 (November 2003): 501-514:503.

^{xii} The tension between black feminist critique and racial loyalty to black men was made public during the 1970s and 80s in the controversies surrounding Michelle Wallace’s *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*.

^{xiii} My analysis centers on these terms because they represent an ontological dichotomy. As such, they do not necessarily map onto the sexual and gender self-identifications of individual black women who for example may self-identify as bisexual, transsexual, or transgendered.

^{xiv} Lani Guiniere and Gerald Torres, *The Miner’s Canary* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

^{xv} Dawson, 53.

^{xvi} The borders of these categories are nevertheless porous, as Dawson points out that many disillusioned liberals come to embrace aspects of black radicalism; Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Martin Kilson argues that older black conservatives such as Booker T. Washington were “organic” in that they had significant support from black communities, unlike the black conservatives that emerged in the 1980s such as Glenn Loury, Shelby Steele, and Thomas Sowell. “Anatomy of Black Conservatism,” *Transition*, 59: 4-19.

^{xvii} For a diagram of these interactions, see Dawson, 36. The black counterpublic is modeled upon Nancy Fraser’s concept of a feminist counter public, which is a critical response to Jurgen Habermas’s ideal of democratic communicative action within a public sphere.

^{xviii} Both invoke natural law to demonstrate the immorality of slavery, in Douglass's time, and Jim Crow in King's. King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," in James W. Washington (ed.) *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986): 289-302; Charles W. Mills, "Whose Fourth of July? Frederick Douglass and 'Original Intent' in Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998): 167-200.

^{xix} "During the period preceding his articulation of the self-segregation scheme and of his subsequent break with the NAACP, he had made the twin discoveries of Marx and Freud. From Marx he learned that there was a deeper structural basis for racial oppression; that it was not enough to fight for integration into a house that was inherently flawed. From Freud he learned to appreciate the irrationality of prejudice and its deep-seatedness." Thomas C. Holt, "The Political Uses of Alienation: W.E.B. Du Bois on Politics, Race, and Culture," *American Quarterly*, vol. 42, No.2 (1990): 301-323, 309. "By 1967 the optimism of King's 1963 speech, 'I Have a Dream,' has disappeared: 'Let me say that we have failed to say something to America enough...However difficult it is to hear, we've got to face the fact that racism still occupies the throne of our nation.'" Dawson, 17.

^{xx} Both organizations encourage and support black civic engagement (e.g., volunteerism), but neither explicitly addresses issues of black sexism and homophobia within these civic associations. See the web sites for each organization.

^{xxi} Mills borrows the term and theme of "natal alienation" from Orlando Patterson.

^{xxii} For an example of Marxist feminism, see Catharine Mackinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

^{xxiii} Charles W. Mills, *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 157.

^{xxiv} Angela Y. Davis, "I am a Revolutionary Black Woman," in Manning Marable and Leith Mullings (eds.), *Let Nobody Turn Us Around* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003): 482-486, 484.

^{xxv} The HBO film, "Civil Brand" focuses on the sexual and psychological abuse of black women in prison.

^{xxvi} Mills, *Blackness Visible*, 39.

^{xxvii} For an historical overview of black nationalism, see John Bracey et. al. (eds.) *Black Nationalism in America* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1970), xxv-lx.

^{xxviii} Examples include the Nation of Islam and the Black Panthers.

^{xxix} E. Frances White, "Africa on my Mind: Gender, Counter Discourse and African American Nationalism" in Beverly Guy-Sheftall (ed.) *Words of Fire: an anthology of African-American Feminist Thought* (New York: New Press, 1995): 505-524, 520.

^{xxx} Dawson finds that these ideologies are the least popular forms of black ideologies among contemporary African Americans. Both black conservatism and black feminism have been singled out and derided by many African Americans as "foreign," white importations that are insufficiently race conscious.

^{xxxi} Patchen Markell, *Bound By Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 8.

^{xxxii} See for example, Adolph Reed, Jr. "The Underclass as Myth and Symbol: The Poverty of Discourse About Poverty," *Radical America* 24 (Winter 1994): 21-40.

^{xxxiii} See Byron D'Andra Orey, "Explaining Black Conservatives: Racial Uplift or Racial Resentment?" *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 34, no.1: 18-22.

^{xxxiv} Glenn C. Loury, *One By One From the Inside Out: Essays and Reviews on Race and Responsibility in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 22.

^{xxxv} Black culture, according to McWhorter, is a "cult of Victimology." "Throughout my life, I have seen that Anti-intellectualism is a central component of black identity. Like a virus, it sets in early, it has no regard for status in society, and once settled, it almost never lets go." *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 99.

^{xxxvi} I borrow the term "interstices" from Hortense Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words" in Carol Vance (ed.) *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

^{xxxvii} For an overview of "patriarchy" ("rule of the father) as it has factored into feminist political theory, see Rosemary Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (Boulder: Westview Press).

^{xxxviii} For a historical analysis of this "politics of respectability," see Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

^{xxxix} Glenn Loury, *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 127.

^{xi} Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 119.

^{xii} Robin D.G. Kelley, “Yo Mama’s disFunktional!: Fighting the culture wars in urban America,” (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 17-18.

^{xiii} See Holloway Sparks, “Queens, Teens, and Model Mothers: Race, Gender, and the Discourse of Welfare Reform” in Sanford Schram, Joe Soss, and Richard Fording (eds.) *Race and the Politics of Welfare Reform* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003): 171-195.

^{xliii} Dorothy Roberts writes, “Black mothers are seen to corrupt the reproduction process at every stage. Black mothers, it is believed, transmit inferior physical traits to the product of conception through their genes. They damage their babies in the womb through their bad habits during pregnancy. They impart a deviant lifestyle to their children through their example.” *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon, 1997), 9.

^{xliv} Orlando Patterson, in trying to adduce a pragmatic compromise between “individual agency” and “a culture of victimhood,” leaves unanswered the question of intra-racial sexism and homophobia. Patterson’s prescription that racial parity for blacks is best achieved through heterosexual interracial marriage both ignores the gendered division of labor within marriage, and the denial of the legal right to marry to lesbians and gay men. Moreover, his reprimand of blacks for having an unusually “low rate of intermarriage with other ethnic groups,” implies the dubious notion that whites and members of other “ethnic groups” are eager to marry blacks in large numbers. Nary a reference to gender or homosexuality appears in the index to Patterson’s book, *The Ordeal of Integration: Progress and Resentment in America’s “Racial Crisis”* (Washington: Civitas, 1997), 193.

^{xlv} Kelley, 18.

^{xlvi} Cornel West, “Nihilism in Black America” in *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

^{xlvii} Dawson, 153.

^{xlviii} Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

^{xlix} For an historical overview of this evolution see Andrew Koppelman, Andrew Koppelman, *Antidiscrimination Law and Social Equality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

ⁱ Deborah King, “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of Black Feminist Ideology”

Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society (Autumn 1988): 42-72.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, 46.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cited in Dawson, 152.

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Koppelman.

^{liv} Collins, *Fighting Words*, 224.

^{lv} It is possible that the inconsistent inclusion of sexuality and gender expression in black feminist arguments reflects the lack of social and legal consensus regarding whether or not sexuality is an immutable characteristic. David A.J. Richards offers a way out of this bind by theorizing homosexuality as analogous to the native language one acquires at an early age. Richards writes, “Under the structural injustice of homophobia, our sense of ourselves as homosexuals can barely connect to our wider beliefs and convictions, but must live in a psychic ghetto of the mind that corresponds to the cultural space of homophobically mandated unspeakability. One’s homosexuality, an effectively forbidden language of sexual experience and sensual bonding, can hardly in such circumstances play the kind of role heterosexuality plays as a language that models and expresses love and friendship in ways that engage our central convictions about personal and ethical meaning in living.”

^{lvi} *Ibid*, 204

^{lvii} David A.J. Richards, *Identity and the Case for Gay Rights: Race, Gender, Religion as analogies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 175.

^{lviii} Deirdre E. Davis, “The Harm That Has No Name: Street Harassment, Embodiment, and African American Women,” in Adrien Wing (ed.) *Critical Race Feminism: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1997): 192-202, 192.

^{lix} Even in women’s private relationships with female friends and relatives the issue of street harassment is rarely discussed.

^{lx} See for example, Carole J. Sheffield, “Sexual Terrorism: The Social Control of Women” in Beth Hess and Myra Marx Ferree (eds.) *Analyzing Gender* (1987): 171.

^{lxi} D. Davis, 193.

^{lxii} D. Davis, citing Elizabeth A. Kissling & Cheri Kramarae, “Stranger Compliments: The Interpretation of Street Remarks” *Women’s Stud. Comm.* vol. 14 (1991): 75-76, 193.

^{lxiii} Iris Marion Young’s conceptualizes gender as a Sartrean series, by which she means that all women, in spite of their many differences, are united in a serial collectivity because they are all subject to the practically inert object of the social rules associated with female embodiment. “Gender as Seriality: thinking about women as a social collective” in Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (eds.) *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 187-215

^{lxiv} See for example, Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*.

^{lxv} “The Jezebel image—the slave woman as ‘whore, sexually aggressive wet nurse,’ and ‘sexual temptress’ served two functions. First, it justified white men’s sexual abuse of slave women. Second, it justified the inapplicability of the cult of true womanhood to slave women—if a slave woman was seen as a sexual animal, then she was not a real woman.” Davis, quoting Hazel Carby, see also bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

^{lxvi} Davis, 198

^{lxvii} Davis citing bell hooks, 198.

^{lxviii} Thelma Golden, “My Brother,” catalogue to the 1994 exhibit, *Black Male*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1.

^{lxix} Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 223.

^{lxx} Not only is street harassment not part of public debates, it is also rarely discussed among women informally. Mothers rarely discuss the issue with their daughters, presumably because they are at a loss for how to address it.

^{lxxi} I borrow the term “ungrievable” from Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

^{lxxii} Catherine McKinley and L. Joyce Delaney speak this erasure in the introduction to their groundbreaking anthology of black lesbian writings, *Afrekete*: “It was our intention as editors to present a collection of writing that speaks strongly, both as individual pieces and to each other, as well as work that interrogates assumptions about Black lesbian lives, problematizes or adds complexity to the prevailing dialogue on the politics of race, gender, and sexuality. All of the writers have committed themselves to the

work of writing Black lesbians into history and the imagination and challenging the body of African-American, in particular, and American letters as a whole.” (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), xvi-xvii.

^{lxxiii} Jackie Bishop, “In Memory of Sakia Gunn,” May 16, 2003, <http://www.keithboykin.com>.

^{lxxiv} Cathy Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 13.

^{lxxv} The concept of “moral proximity” factors into Kwame Anthony Appiah’s definition of intrinsic racism. Whereas extrinsic racists believe that people belonging to different racial groups differ in morally relevant ways, such as honesty, intelligence, or courage, intrinsic racists believe that people have a greater moral responsibility to those of their racial group. *In My Father’s House: Africa and the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 14.

^{lxxvi} Cohen, 14.

^{lxxvii} Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Fear of Gay Marriage Gives the GOP Another Chance at Minority Voters: Queer Eye for the Black Guy,” *The Village Voice* (September 24-30, 2003). Homophobia has been largely responsible for the failure of many black community organizations to respond swiftly to the HIV/AIDS crisis, which is disproportionately affecting black women and men. See also Cohen, *Boundaries of Blackness*; and Cathy Cohen and Tamara Jones, “Fighting Homophobia versus Challenging Heterosexism: ‘The Failure to Transform’ Revisited” in Eric Brandt (ed.) *Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks, Gays, and the Struggle for Equality* (New York: The New Press, 1999): 80-101.

^{lxxviii} Dawson, 11.

^{lxxix} Naomi Zack, “The American Sexualization of Race” in *Race/Sex: their sameness, difference, and interplay* (New York: Routledge, 1997) ed. By Naomi Zack, 145-155, 148

^{lxxx} Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race” *Signs* (Winter 1992): 251-274, 255.

^{lxxxi} Mills, *From Class to Race*, 128.

^{lxxxii} They define “womanism as a consciousness that incorporates racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic, and political considerations.” New terminology does not mean that the holistic principles of womanism are new; early black feminists such as Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, Fannie Barrier Williams, and Maggie Lena Walker predicated their scholarship and activism upon intersectionality. Elsa

Barkley Brown, “Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke” in Micheline Malson et. al. (eds.) *Black Women in America: Social Science Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 176-177.

^{lxxxiii} Black feminists such as Audre Lorde, Cathy Cohen, Patricia Hill Collins, and bell hooks have urged explicit attention to the issue of sexuality in black feminist theory. Dawson, 152.

^{lxxxiv} Audre Lorde, “I am Your Sister” in Marable and Mullings: 537-544, 539.

^{lxxxv} Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139 (1989).

^{lxxxvi} For an excellent overview of critical race theory see the introductory essay in Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (eds.) *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Made the Movement* (New York: The New Press, 1995): xiii-xxxii.

^{lxxxvii} Cohen, *Boundaries of Blackness*.

^{lxxxviii} Some men, especially men who are perceived as gay, also experience street harassment. But because street harassment is about power, whistles and catcalls directed at black men by black women do not generally signify sexual intimidation. Street harassment is not a condition of black male embodiment.

^{lxxxix} Crenshaw, “Beyond Racism and Misogyny,” 132.