

PROGRESSIVE BLACK MASCULINITIES

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EDITOR

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
New York London

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Dedication

To

Lumumba

Amani

Mwalimu

Each of whom continues to teach me more about life every day.
May you grow to be Progressive Black Men.

To

Kaybren, Lindani, Michael, and Gabriel

The young ones that inspire me.

May you too grow to be Progressive Black Men.

To

Loye and Erin

The ones who tickle my heart.

May you grow up surrounded by Progressive Black Masculinities.

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
270 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10016

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
2 Park Square
Milton Park, Abingdon
Oxon OX14 4RN

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

International Standard Book Number-10: 0-415-97687-1 (Softcover) 0-415-97686-3 (Hardcover)
International Standard Book Number-13: 978-0-415-97687-9 (Softcover) 978-0-415-97686-2 (Hardcover)

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Acknowledgments

Many people were instrumental in bringing about the writing, editing, and publication of this book. I would first like to thank the committee members who worked with me in conceptualizing and hosting the conferences on progressive black masculinities, held jointly at the State University of New York institutions, the University at Buffalo Law School, and the Buffalo State College. My sincere thanks go to Timothy Brown, Scott Johnson, Stephanie Phillips, and Ron Stewart. Their work was invaluable. I also received inspiration and direction from many other people. In particular I want to thank Devon Carbado and Angela Harris for their advice in the early formulation of the workshop and project, and Alex De Veaux for her continuing guidance, insight, and support throughout the project and the compilation of this book.

Each and every contributor to this book deserves my heartfelt thanks. These people not only attended the conferences but also put their immense talents toward exploring the project of progressive black masculinities. By name, these people are Tim Brown, Thema Bryant-Davis, Gay Byron, John Calmore, Patricia Hill Collins, Nathan Grant, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Whitney Harris, Lisa Iglesias, Michael Kimmel, Bahati Kuumba, Teresa Miller, Mark Anthony Neal, and Stephanie Phillips. I owe a special thanks to Pat, Beverly, and Michael, who tirelessly encouraged me as I edited the book and shopped around for publishers, and to Teresa Miller who not only enthusiastically encouraged me throughout the book editing process but took time out of her busy schedule to help me proof many of the chapters.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to the many faculty and staff at the Law School and the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy at the University of Buffalo, who provided long-term support for this project. In particular I want to thank Nils Olsen, the dean of the Law School, who provided unwavering commitment to this project, to my scholarship in general, and to my career in teaching law. He has been an invaluable mentor. I also would like to thank Lynn Mather, director of the Baldy Center, and Laura Mangan, associate director of the Center, for their enthusiasm and steadfast sponsorship of the project from beginning to end. Further, every book project requires a dedicated research team. My sincere thanks go to my team in Buffalo, Annie Davey, Harvan Deshield, Jennifer Scarf, Joseph Schneider, and especially Jane Morris, all of whom performed this task with excellence.

The superb team at Routledge/Taylor & Francis provided much needed direction, encouragement and expertise in the process of bringing this work

to the public. Many thanks to Matthew Byrnie, who walked me through the approval and publishing procedures, Rachael Panthier, who managed the production process, and Frederick Veith, who kept me on task.

My extended family has always been a cradle of love for me, providing me with their enduring support throughout my life. Margaret Johnson, my mom, has always been my greatest cheerleader and my finest model. Luther Johnson, my dad, has always been the giant on whose shoulders I have stood. The love and work ethic of these two pillars of my life have been essential to grounding my development, together with the love of my sister, Laurie Daniels; my brother, Darron Johnson; my cousin, Kim Horsely; and my aunt Carolyn Jones. Each of these individuals lead what I like to term *progressive black lives*. I also want to make special mention of Leonard Harrison, my maternal uncle, affectionately known as "Mzee," because of his thirty-year sojourn in Tanzania. In my life book, he is a tower of black nationalism and one of the unsung heroes of the American civil rights movement. He has always insisted that I be a critical thinker and has urged me to push the political boundaries in search of justice. My love and thanks to all of these people.

But it is because of my three sons that I produced this book. Even as I have raised them, I continue to learn a great deal from them. It is my fervent hope that Lumumba, Amani, and Mwalimu will be progressive forces in the spaces they occupy and will grow into progressive black men. I thank them for both inspiring and challenging me. And last but not least, I must thank Makau Mutua, the love of my life, my life partner, and friend. When I undertook this project he advised me to go out and find some black men to help me think through these issues. It was advice I heeded. However, this is my interpretation of much of that advice, and though the success of this text belongs to those named and many unnamed, I alone am to blame for any shortcomings it may have. I want to thank Makau for his patience, guidance, love, and support. Without it, you the reader and I the editor would unlikely be at this place right now.

Athena D. Mutua

Introduction: Mapping the Contours of Progressive Masculinities

ATHENA D. MUTUA

In 2001, scholars at the University at Buffalo Law School and Buffalo State College organized a workshop to explore the concept of progressive black masculinities and to examine the many supports and obstacles to their performance. The workshop was part of a larger project on progressive black masculinities that included a conference in 2002 and the presentation and development of the essays included in this book. This introduction briefly describes the tensions inherent in the concept of progressive black masculinities. It then discusses the development of this project, the themes and struggles that informed it, and presents a summary of the essays.

Progressive black masculinities are unique and innovative practices of the masculine self actively engaged in struggles to transform social structures of domination. These structures and relations of domination constrain, restrict, and suppress the full development of the human personality. Progressive masculinities are committed to liberating others and themselves from these constraints and therefore eschew relations of domination in their personal and public lives. This is no mean feat as masculinity itself is usually understood and practiced as a system of domination within the family, culture, economy, and political/legal structures of the United States.

Racism, too, is a system of domination. Thus it would appear that black men, particularly those who have been involved in the struggle against racism, would have an advantage in the project of asserting progressive masculinities. These black men have not only felt but also have seen, understood, and fought against the limiting deprivations imposed on the human personality and community by racism. This experience gives them an advantage; namely, they are accustomed to swimming against the tide and taking other folks along with them. This is true for some. But the wages of racism, and, sometimes, even the fight against racism, have operated in ways that impede the realization of progressive black masculinities. In addition, the ways in which racism is connected to and mutually supports other systems of domination—such as those related to matters of sex, gender, sexuality, and class—seem to stifle progressive black masculine practices. Yet progressive masculinities appear crucial to efforts seeking to transform the social structures and systems that reduce human potential, including the human potential of black people and black communities.

Inspiration

The workshop was inspired by two sets of discussions that reflected larger debates within black communities: one centering on the gendered nature of black men's oppression as exemplified by mass incarceration; the other centering on black men's complicity in systems of domination that oppress others but in the process also reinforce their own oppression. The first discussion emerged during a critical race theory course that my colleague Stephanie Phillips and I were teaching in spring 2000. The course featured a selection of class readings that juxtaposed discussions of certain features of slavery and current practices of mass incarceration, a complex of policies and practices that have had a devastating effect on black communities.¹ The similarities between the two systems were striking, including the limitations on personal mobility, the exploitation of black bodies largely for the benefit of other groups, and the ways in which both slavery and mass incarceration were used to consolidate white racial privilege.² This was an intriguing examination. In particular, as mass incarceration seemed to be something that happened more often to black men—as well as brown men—than to black women, we asked what was going on socially with regard to black men.

Commonsense explanations suggested that a complex array of social factors such as poverty, racism, the war on drugs, changed penal policies, and culturally specific behavior patterns gave rise to the mass incarceration of black men. Although various analyses weighted a host of factors, to the extent there was a focus on black and brown men, many studies suggested that racism played a part.³ Black women, however, are also subject to some of these same conditions, including racism and poverty; but, though black women are experiencing rising levels of incarceration, their numbers do not begin to compare to those of black men. Michael Kimmel and others have suggested that violence and criminality, however defined, have a male face.⁴ It is gendered.

And so we began to focus on this aspect of the problem. We wondered to what extent black men faced suspicion and the narrowing of their life opportunities because they were both black and men, and we suspected there was a host of these experiences. In other words, we posited that racism alone, even if it accounted for the disproportionate amount of poverty among black people, could not explain certain types of black male experiences. They seemed to have a gender component. That is, black men appeared to be targeted for certain kinds of treatment because they were both black and men.

Black nationalist discourses historically, though generally arguing that the societal mistreatment of black men was a function of racism, implied a gender component to black male oppression.⁵ But they never quite took their own critique seriously. Black nationalists argued that black men were more threatening to the established order of white supremacy than black women; thus, the society, given its order, treated black men far worse than it treated

black women or women in general. Further, others suggested that black men had developed culturally specific forms of behavior—some productive, others not—to resist this racist oppression, some of which produced problematic outcomes for black men.⁶

In addition, nationalist discourses at one time seemed to equate the black male condition with conditions of entire black communities⁷ (see Kuumba, Ch. 13). Thus, the rest of the argument followed: To remedy the black communities' problems, the struggle against racism had to address primarily the conditions of black men, to center on their predicament. Remedying the conditions of black men meant providing them access to jobs and other opportunities that would allow them to be real men, defined by the established order as being in a position to lead, to provide for, and to control their environments and their families, including their women and children. With the absence of racism and black men firmly in the lead controlling all other members of the community, the problems in the community would disappear.⁸

In other words, providing black men access to patriarchal privilege was the answer to the oppressed conditions of black communities. Therefore, though these discourses posited that black men were oppressed because they were both black and men, there was little need to further develop a specific theory to explore the gender aspect of this phenomenon because, arguably, it was simply an aspect of the larger problem of racism. Apparently, the established order's social arrangements with regard to sex and gender were an accepted and agreed-upon fact.⁹

Black feminists, however, challenged this articulation of black communities' problems as well as its implied remedy on several fronts. First, black feminist writings suggested that the conditions of black male oppression did not entirely account for the nature of the oppression experienced by all community members. In particular, it did not account for the conditions of over half of the communities' population, that of black women. Black women's oppressed conditions, they argued, were not simply a product of white racism but were also a product of sexism, a system in which black men were also implicated.¹⁰

Second, this nationalist articulation did not necessarily account for the conditions of black children, both boys and girls. From this perspective, community problems that touched on women or children such as domestic violence, incest, child abuse, rape, and sexual harassment, while implicating racism and class structures that render black people disproportionately poor, were primarily attributable to sexist and patriarchal practices in which black men played a role. In addition, some argued, racism did not entirely account for the oppression of sexual minorities in the community, whether male or female.¹¹ However, though black feminists broadly explored the impact of the relationship between the dominant society's racism and its sex-gender system on black women, for the most part they initially did not apply their insights of this system to the experiences of black men¹² (see Phillips, Ch. 12).

Hence, both sets of discourses suggested that black people, including black men, contributed to problems in black communities and in the case of mass incarceration facilitated it through unproductive behavior. However, it seemed to us that neither black nationalist nor black feminist discourses adequately addressed the gendered and racial oppression of black men or gendered racism of black men.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's comments in the foreword of Devon Carbado's book *Black Men on Race, Gender, and Sexuality* (New York: New York University Press, 1999) were the second stimulus for the project. That book brought together a variety of black men to comment on the issues of race, gender, and sexuality.¹³ The essays were both engaging and moving. However, Crenshaw commented that even though the book was a timely contribution to the topic, she nevertheless was dusting off her "Integrate Now" button. She suggested, in short, that few of the essays seemed to take seriously the idea of integrating gender and sexuality into black political consciousness. Rather, many of the essays still placed the male hetero subject in the center of black politics without engaging feminist and other critiques of the intersecting patterns of patriarchy and racism. She apparently awaited a more progressive engagement of race, gender, and sexuality by black men.¹⁴

We decided to take up the challenge of exploring what more progressive black masculinities might be. Given that black men's oppression appeared to be based on both race and gender, as well as class, sexuality, and a host of other oppressive social structures, we doubted that removing racism alone would free black men. Stated differently, we questioned whether racism could be eliminated without also attacking its gender, class, and sexual components. Further, we suspected that black male complicity in the subordination and oppression of others, including patriarchal practice, might also reinforce and contribute to their own subordination.

These two different angles—one about the gendered nature of black men's oppression and the other about the ways in which black men are complicit in domination, both their own and that of others—form the central theoretical explorations around which the conferences were organized.

In addition, the project had a broader political agenda. This entailed bringing a diverse community of academic scholars and activists together not only to map the current conceptions of progressive black masculinities but also to add these voices and our findings to the larger community debate about the roles and experiences of black men. This larger debate in the context of black communities was exemplified in the reaction to and discussion of the regressive book by Shahrazad Ali titled the *Blackman's Guide to Understanding the Blackwoman*.¹⁵ It is also exemplified by the hundreds of books exploring the conditions of black men, mostly from a racial perspective,¹⁶ and a smaller set of books and enterprises exploring the gendered aspect of black men's identity and experiences.¹⁷ In the end, we hoped as a practical matter

to build coalitions among the various proponents of different paradigms around the intersectional issue of race and gender. Further, we hoped to come out of the process not only with some ideas of what constituted progressive black masculinities but also with some activities through which people could both express and cultivate progressive black masculinities.

Constructing a Community

The planning committee approached the topic of progressive black masculinities primarily from a community perspective, though not exclusively so.¹⁸ Conceptually, this meant we were inclined to invite primarily people from black communities that seemed to have a stake in progressive black masculine practice to participate in the project. Presumably, all black people—and perhaps other people as well—had such a stake, including black men, women, sexual minorities and black people from all classes and religions. They seemed to have a stake in this idea because what happened to black men affected what happened in these communities. Black men's issues and problems were community issues, even if the issues affecting them or the resolution of their issues did not constitute the sole set of concerns for these communities or begin to resolve all the concerns and problems facing a community.

At the same time, however, centering black men or focusing on black male issues—even ideas of progressive practice—seemed to reinforce older patterns of thought that insisted that men's issues were the most important issues in a community and therefore should be both the center of focus all of the time and should command most community resources. We simply rejected these ideas as a basis for our work and understood them largely as the discredited and flawed egotisms of male supremacist thinking. Further, as individuals and individuals within communities, we knew that though some of us would always work primarily on black male issues, others of us would explore other issues, conditions, and peoples. In addition, communities' various focuses would shift with their changing needs.

Concretely, a community approach to the project of exploring progressive black masculinities meant bringing together scholars and activists working in diverse fields and operating from different perspectives and paradigms on issues germane to black communities. Three factors influenced this vision and helped to determine the various groups of scholars that the project organizing committee initially invited.

The first was Carbado's book and others like it.¹⁹ Carbado had brought together a variety of black men who worked in different disciplines and approached the subject matter of race, gender and sexuality from a variety of perspectives. Committee members planning the conference thought this was a successful approach and wanted to replicate it. However, they wanted to broaden its focus to include women and men as well as activists and scholars. Second, through its own discussions of the issues the committee had

demonstrated that its diversity of views and expertise were useful in questioning and mapping different black male practices and various performances of masculinity. The committee consisted of five members. Two were legal scholars working from the perspective of critical race theory. The other three taught a number of courses on the topic of black men in their respective fields of criminology, sociology, and communications informed by Afrocentric thinking.

Third, the topic of progressive black masculinities, as it had developed in our own minds, evidenced contrary visions about the roles and experiences of black men by those writing from a black feminist perspective and those writing from more nationalist discourses. Thus, the committee wanted to try, at least, to bring leading scholars and activists from these two traditions together. The committee decided at this point to host two conferences. The first conference would be a roundtable dialogue and workshop to discuss and to define the notion of progressive masculinities as well as to chart the future for the larger conference. It would also however, among other things, center a discussion between black feminist scholars and Afrocentric thinkers, whose scholarship represented a strain of black nationalist thought.

The committee thought that black feminists had developed a sophisticated theory of the relationship between race and gender: intersectional theory.²⁰ Even though intersectional theory had been applied primarily to excavating the lives, experiences, and perspectives of black women, we believed it would nevertheless provide solid insights into the gendered racism of black men. However, intersectional theory had been interpreted in two ways that seemed to limit its power to explain the conditions of black men and for which, as Stephanie Phillips points out, black feminists had been criticized.

First, it was said to suggest that black men at the intersection of race and gender were subordinated by race and privileged by gender. As such, it seemed to imply that black men were not affected by racism that was gendered. Second, and related to the first idea, the theory seemed to suggest that because black women were subordinated by both gender and racism, they were doubly oppressed and thus more oppressed than black men. Though instances can be found where black women appear more subordinated than black men, as in the case of wage differentials, we challenged whether black men were privileged by gender and subordinated by race in all circumstances. We speculated that at times black men were oppressed by gender in addition to race. But we rejected the victim sweepstakes in which subgroups of an oppressed group such as blacks argued over who was more oppressed to claim the centrality of their cause within black communities. Instead, we suspected that black men, like black women, had unique experiences of gendered racism.

These ideas led the committee to the methodology it would use for the workshop. The committee would formulate questions relating to the gaps created by a particular theory's application to black men's conditions and the conditions more generally of black communities and its various members. Thus,

the committee posed the following question to black feminists in the workshop: *Is the racialized gendered oppression that black men face exemplified in racial profiling, sexism? Or is it simply a product of racism? How does current black feminist thinking understand the gender analysis implicit in the older claim that white supremacy "castrates" black men?*²¹

The committee had different kinds of concerns with regard to Afrocentric thinkers. Afrocentricity is a strain of black nationalist thought. Though it is a contested term, Molefi Asante, one of its central articulators, suggests that Afrocentricity differs from black nationalism in that the latter is a political, economic, and cultural project whereas the former is a perspective.²² Afrocentricity seeks both to develop and to draw on African and African diasporan knowledge, history, and experiences, including the experiences of blacks in America, to analyze the conditions and views of black people. Afrocentric work has been interpreted and criticized in a number of ways (see Mutua, Ch. 1). But the organizing committee's biggest concern was the critique of Afrocentricity as sexist and homophobic.²³ In earlier work, Asante argued that "homosexuality is a deviation from Afrocentric thought,"²⁴ whereas Haki Madhubuti, another Afrocentric thinker, was understood as bemoaning the decline of male dominance in the black community.²⁵ However, both seemed to have softened these positions in later work, and Afrocentric thinkers on the committee argued that the paradigm had grown beyond these limitations.

Some support for this position can be found in the literature.²⁶ In fact, Madhubuti's book *Tough Notes: A Healing Call for Creating Exceptional Black Men* issued a clarion call for men to participate in women's liberation. Yet a certain maleness to Afrocentric writings remains, which smacks of the patriarchy reminiscent of the black nationalist positions of the 1960s. For instance, Asante, in describing historical violence against African Americans in his 2003 book, used mostly examples of racist violence against black males even though the book is not about men.²⁷ Further, Na'im Akbar's book *Visions for a Black Man* supposedly provided a liberation program for black people but seemed to promote a male-centered vision.²⁸ In addition, Afrocentric thinkers have done a great deal of work on black men but have paid relatively little attention to the plight of black women or other members of black communities.²⁹ In fact, their most notable programs deal primarily with black males. These include their work to establish all-black male schools for black boys and their initiation or rites-of-passage programs for black male youths.

However, precisely because Afrocentric scholars have done considerable work on black men, we thought they could substantially add to a project on black masculinities. The question, though, became how they might define progressive and whether their definitions would be predicated on the domination of women and the exclusion of black sexual minorities. We thus posed the following question at the workshop to be directed to them: *Are there visions and practices of progressive black masculinities within Afrocentric imaginings that do not rely on*

*heterosexuality and limited stereotyped roles of women? What does it mean to be a black male and black female in the context of the United States?*³⁰

Also, the committee directed one other question to the workshop as a whole. The committee's own analysis suggested that although many of the prospective participants examined racism or sexism as social systems of privilege and oppression, they shared a common outlook in their belief in the agency of people. In other words, they believed that despite structural oppression, people, both as individuals and groups, were capable of acting both to define and to change their circumstances. With regard to black men, they agreed that black men's agency was at a minimum shaped, hindered, and constrained by racist oppression and potentially gendered racism, but this agency—the ability to act on and to change their circumstances—remained. At the same time, most of these participants seemed committed to the broader issues of democracy, justice, and coalition building. With this in mind, the committee drew on a statement by Cornel West in asking the following question: *How do black men practice and how might they be a part of building mature black identities, coalitional strategies, and black cultural democracy, of the sort that Cornel West suggests, in the oppressed space they occupy? What are features of or how might progressive black masculinities be described?*³¹

In addition to black feminists and Afrocentric theorists, the committee also targeted a number of other groups for their participation in the workshop. These included critical race theorists, masculinities studies scholars, gay activists, and queer theorists. Two of the committee members were critical race theorists who argued that the theory's antisubordination stance should infuse a definition of progressive black masculinities.

Critical race theory was developed in the legal academy. It holds that "race and racism are endemic to the American social normative order and that law is part of the social fabric of the country as well as its normative order."³² Thus, critical race theorists suggest that "law does not merely reflect and mediate pre-existing racialized social conflicts and relations."³³ Rather, "it constitutes, constructs and produces races and race relations in a way that supports" white racial power and black subordination.³⁴ They support this claim by analyzing cases, laws, and legal patterns to expose the ways in which law constitutes and supports the status quo.³⁵ Their goal is not only to understand the bonds between law and white racial power but also to change them.³⁶ Specifically, they seek to work "toward the liberation of people of color as they embrace the larger project of liberating all oppressed people."³⁷ The idea of working toward the liberation of all people is captured in some critical race theory circles and related scholarship as the stance and practice of antisubordination—an active stance against all forms of domination or subordination.³⁸ Critical race theory's antisubordination push or social justice orientation formed a central proposal to the workshop in defining progressive and was later adopted as a basis of the project.

The committee also thought it imperative to invite masculinities studies scholars to the workshop. These scholars draw on feminist insights but focus on men and men's lives and, thus, on masculinity as a gendered concept. They developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity, defined as a society's dominant masculine model, or what I call this society's ideal masculine model—a model to which society enforces compliance by privileging and rewarding those who come closest to it and penalizing those who stray or are distant from it. Masculinities scholars argue that hegemonic masculinity is the standard or ideal against which all men are measured and under which few measure up. Hegemonic masculinity is contrasted with subordinated masculinities, a term used to describe those groups of men subordinated by such things as class, race, and sexuality.

These scholars concede that the general study of such subjects as history, art, and science are studies about issues that men have constructed and thought were important but argue that these studies deal with man as an embodiment of a human ideal rather than with men as men.³⁹ Therefore, they argue, these studies fail to unpack how men feel, think, and experience themselves as men. Masculinities studies scholars suggest that although men are the dominant and privileged group, specifically vis-à-vis women, they often do not feel powerful as individuals. They thus react to feminist assertions of male power with incredulity, exclaiming, "What do you mean power? I have no power at all. My wife bosses me around, my kids boss me around, and my boss bosses me around. I'm completely powerless."⁴⁰ The theory thus arose from two different trajectories: one recognizing that men benefit from the social relations of patriarchal power and is profeminist and antisexist, and the other from men's movements that emphasized the pain and felt powerlessness of men, given the current needs and structure of society.⁴¹ Both trajectories, however, embrace a male-affirmative approach to masculinity.

To the extent that masculinities studies is an antisexist movement, these scholars have argued that "[h]eterosexism is more fundamental to the dynamics of sexism than is, for example, racism or classism."⁴² This is so in part because heterosexism seeks to compel and to privilege a certain kind of sexuality; namely, it promotes heterosexuality at the expense of gay, lesbian, and other sexual minorities' lives and ways of being. As such, this faction of masculinities studies scholars tends to support the movements of sexual minorities. Some critical race theorists also understand the gay struggle as a struggle for liberation from oppressive social systems. Basically these groups, like feminists, suggest that the United States has a sex-gender system that requires both social and sexual roles for women and men. These sexual roles compel heterosexuality, thereby excluding or denigrating same-sex practices. The gendered concept of hegemonic masculinity embraces this compulsion and, therefore, excludes gay being and practice from its definitions of masculinity.

Gay activism and theorizing, along with queer theory, it seemed to us, were crucial to any project with the goal of rethinking masculinity. Gay activism challenges the sex–gender system as being simply incompatible with reality. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and transsexual (GLBTT) people do exist, including in black communities. Further, their theorizing has helped to delineate and to elaborate the boundaries and limitations of the sex–gender system.⁴³ In addition, they have provided alternative ways of thinking about and of being masculine and have demonstrated other ways of being human. They have exposed the human cost of rigidly regulating and oppressing consensual adult sexual expression. Therefore, the committee targeted gay activists, scholars, and queer scholars, particularly black gay and other queer scholars, as indispensable to a workshop geared toward the community exploration of progressive black masculinities.

Successes, Absences, and the 2002 Conference

The workshop, as planned and executed, proved a stimulating event for all participants. However, one major absence plagued the project in its entirety: the failure of leading Afrocentric scholars to attend either the workshop or conference. The reasons for this are varied. Part of the fault lay in the committee's approach to invitations. The committee sought to invite people who were perceived as willing to engage in a day-long dialogue instead of the usual academic conference arrangement in which many speakers attend only for so long as it takes them to make their presentations. This desire on our part meant that several people, particularly some activists, were not able to make such a commitment. Further, the committee's decision to try to invite people who were known to be particularly capable of facilitating and participating in dialogue, despite their having clear positions on certain issues, also complicated the process. Though we used our own networks to attempt to learn more about various scholars and activists, our own limited knowledge meant that we did not invite enough scholars working within a particular field or paradigm to ensure that field or paradigm's representation.

However, it must be noted that a number of Afrocentric scholars expressed some hesitancy about participating in the project. Although this hesitancy may have resulted from a number of reasons, at least one scholar was clear about his discomfort. He found the inclusion of an antihomophobic position as part of the definition of progressive masculinities troubling. He suggested, as Asante had written, that homosexuality was contrary to the values of Afrocentricity. Thus, some of the particular perspectives and ideas we thought leading Afrocentric scholars might well be able to articulate are not among the essays written for this collection. This does not mean that the Afrocentric perspective is totally absent from this volume. In fact, a number of writers, including at least one of the organizing committee's members, write from an Afrocentric perspective, and still others draw on Afrocentric insights and writings about

black men. Further, to the extent that Afrocentricity shares some ideas with black feminism, critical race theory, and certain masculinities studies scholars, these ideas are also captured in these essays. Nonetheless, this book offers one of only several efforts to engage a range of scholars around the idea and practice of progressive black masculinities. It is our hope that these ideas will continue to be developed by a host of different scholars in the future.

The success of the 2001 workshop augured well for the 2002 conference. The conference expanded the types of activists and scholars invited to present their expertise, views, and experiences of progressive black masculinities. In particular, the conference sought to include a wider range of topics and people. For instance, the committee sought and succeeded in bringing scholars to the conference who could talk knowledgeably about youth culture and about hip-hop in particular. Further, the committee sought to engage religious notions about gender. The workshop raised the question of whether ideas about progressive masculinities as antisubordination practice, both at the level of personal and political practice, were compatible with various religious doctrines. Women at the parallel conference for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women similarly questioned whether the common interpretations of the world's religions—defined as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism—were compatible with women's human rights. It was thought then as well as in the context of the progressive masculinities project that most religions are often interpreted as endorsing the complementary, hierarchal, and heterosexual-only roles for men and women and thus are potentially incompatible with women's human rights or progressive black masculinities. Though we were interested particularly in Christian and Muslim practice, as the majority of African Americans believe in one of these two faiths, only Christianity is explored in the essays included in this volume. Exploring progressive masculinities from a Muslim perspective as well as from other religious standpoints remain areas for future research. The tentative responses to whether current interpretations of Christianity might support progressive masculinities were a resounding “maybe.” But given the historical prophetic Christian practices of African Americans,⁴⁴ support of such practices is possible (see Gay Byron, Ch. 6).

Finally, many speakers at the conference as well as writers in this book touch on the relationships among black men, notions of work, masculinity, and gendered racism. However, black men and work is a vastly under-explored topic from a progressive perspective, both in this text and in general. For example, no single article in this book attempts to tackle this web of issues, even at a theoretical level, perhaps because this topic is a book or series of books within itself. Yet, because the notion of work and the role of the provider have been fundamental to the ideology of hegemonic masculinity and in light of the high joblessness among black men, the transitioning of the American economy, globalization, and the entry in new ways with new impacts of other peoples and players in the world economy, this area is one that deserves

additional, serious, and creative exploration and thought. We will explore and we hope others will explore these and other topics in the future.

The Essays

Many of the authors in this text embrace a social justice framework in their approach to examining black masculine practice and the conditions of black men's lives. Although the topics these authors explore emphasize different aspects of this framework, inherent in each essay is an understanding of progressive black masculinities as innovative performances of the masculine self that eschew dominance and are engaged in the struggle to transform social structures of domination. At the same time, as many of the authors point out, the structures of domination that limit and subordinate black men are not limited to racism alone but include other structures such as gendered racism, sexism, class, heterosexism, and so on. Consequently, in struggling to transform these structures, progressive black masculinities seek to liberate not only themselves but also others.

The book is divided into seven parts containing two or three chapters each. The first part is entitled "Theorizing Progressive Black Masculinities." My chapter of the same title opens this part. In it, I build on many of the ideas and schools of thought explored in this introduction for the purpose of clarifying the theoretical foundations of the book. I argue that the definition of progressive black masculinities is grounded in the twin projects of progressive blackness and progressive masculinities. I suggest that progressive blackness is an antiracist, and more generally an antidomination project committed to the existential wholeness and well being of black people and communities. However, I argue, as I have indicated here, that this project is undermined by commitments to ideal masculinity, which like racism is a system of domination. I spend some time explaining what ideal masculinity is and how it works. Progressive masculinities also is an antidomination political project but one that is committed in part to re-orienting masculine practice away from ideal masculinity, and by definition including a profeminist stance.

Beverly Guy-Sheftall, in Chapter 2 of this part, grounds many of the ideas about progressive black masculinities in the profeminist philosophies of some of our most heroic male leaders. Titled "Remembering Our Feminist Forefathers," Guy-Sheftall focuses on black history, drawing out the contributions a number of prominent black historical figures have made to feminist thinking. She notes that the history of feminism, particularly black feminism, is often told as if black men had no part in the development of the theory and practices. She corrects this omission by presenting the profeminist writings and what I would call progressive masculine writings of three legendary black men: Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Benjamin Mays.

The last chapter in this part is a thought piece. A thought piece is a short reflection essay meant to provoke thought and pose a question rather than

explore an issue through sustained analysis. In this chapter, Elizabeth Iglesias ruminates on what it might mean to move into mature personhood, coalitional networks, and black cultural democracy in an anti-essentialist way. She suggests that maturity may mean evolving to a point where we see "the other" as ourselves. This kind of perspective, she suggests, might allow us to act as political agents beyond our own political struggles. She then goes on to question how ideas of black cultural democracy might handle dissent.

Part 2 entitled "Strength, Not Privilege or Domination," explains several dynamics inherent in American hegemonic or ideal masculinity. These include, 1) the notion of and the ways in which privilege works; 2) the ways in which black men may practice domination or assert privilege through hegemonic notions of masculinity; and 3) the ways in which black men are harmed by the American hegemonic system of masculinity. It suggests that progressive black masculinities are those that eschew domination and privilege as features of masculine practice. Michael Kimmel's chapter, "Toward a Pedagogy of the Oppressor," opens the part with a discussion of privilege. He sets out to explain what privilege is, what it means to have it, how it operates, and why those who have it must recognize it. He then examines what privilege for black men might mean and the ways it might manifest itself given racism. Patricia Hill Collins's essay, "A Telling Difference: Dominance, Strength, and Black Masculinities," follows, examining the harm that black men do to themselves when they internalize and occupy the limited images and spaces dictated to them by American hegemonic masculinity. She situates these harms in a racist gender ideology that relegates and defines black men as weak. Black men are considered weak, she explains, in part because hegemonic masculinity is a relational concept in which there are "real men" and then there are weak others against whom real men are defined. Real men are defined as not like women, not gay, not poor, not like boys, and not black. Instead, a "real man" under hegemonic masculinity requires that "men" dominate these identities and dominate in all circumstances, with this domination masquerading as strength. Collins encourages black men to reject domination as the central feature of masculinity and its black men-as-weak thesis, suggesting a number of ways in which this process might begin.

Part 3 titled "Christianity: Progressive Interpretations?" explores the compatibility of current Christian religious understandings with ideas of progressive masculinities. Gay Byron's chapter is first. It examines several biblical scriptures from Paul's letters that are often used to justify limited roles for women and to condemn gay life. She suggests these scriptures are interpreted literally and are used as authoritative guides for a Christian life in many black communities. This is so, even though black communities have rejected literal understandings of the injunctions supporting slavery, often found in the very same passages in which sexist injunctions are located. Using contemporary scholarship to interrogate these scriptures, she posits alternative

interpretations of these passages and locates other Pauline scriptures that aid in the development of progressive masculinities. She then turns to extrabiblical texts to explore images and ideas that might inform progressive black masculine practice. Specifically she examines the life of Black Moses as a possible model. Whitney Harris' discussion of Christianity and progressive black masculinities is next and begins by him sharing his own personal experience as a black gay priest in the Catholic Church. He explains the ways in which he learned to engage in what he calls "loyal opposition," a practice meant to subvert the church's racist, sexist and homophobic orientation while remaining faithful to its message of salvation through Christ. He then turns to the message of Christ's life, suggesting that Christ refigured masculinity in his own time and explaining that progressive black men have to re-imagine God, reform their God talk, and refigure their own masculinity as Christ did.

Part 4, "From Unwanted Traffic to Prison," turns to an examination of the gendered racist oppression of black men. John Calmore's chapter "Reasonable and Unreasonable Suspects: The Cultural Construction of the Anonymous Black Man in Public Space (Here Be Dragons)" opens this part with his discussion of black men as unwanted traffic. He explains the ways in which the intersection of racial and gendered oppression is spatialized to produce black men as unwanted and as unwanted traffic. Employing cultural studies scholarship, he notes that all black men are subject to being constructed as unwanted traffic when they enter anonymous space — space in which they are personally unknown. However, he suggests that this construction has more dire consequences for black men who are working class or poor. Nevertheless, he argues that the community as a whole is injured by this situation and that black men must work in solidarity across the differences of class to remedy it. He then focuses on felony disenfranchisement as an example of this broad community injury and as an opportunity for men and black communities to act purposefully and in solidarity. Teresa Miller's chapter is a natural complement to Calmore's piece. One of the consequences of the construction of men as unwanted traffic is the heavy policing and imprisonment of black men. However, Miller in "Incarcerated Masculinities" focuses on the definitions and practices of masculinity in prisons. She argues that sexualized violence is what makes a man a "Man" in prison in the current moment and discusses the ways in which this practice is racialized. She then turns to the consequences of prison masculinities and of imprisonment itself on black men as well as to the consequences to the communities to which these men return after being released.

Turning next to the media's relation to this topic is Part 5 of the book, "Black Men in (Re)View." Nathan Grant opens this part. He comments on black men's limited access to the small screen (television) and the continuing importance of comedy given that it is in comedy that black men continue to have the greatest access as lead characters. He, therefore, focuses on two of the most commercially successful primetime shows with black male lead characters: *The Cosby Show*

and *Martin*. In his essay "Mirror's Fade to Black: Masculinity, Misogyny, Class Ideation in *The Cosby Show* and *Martin*" he critiques both shows as failing to proffer progressive masculinities. *The Cosby Show*, he argues offered "fantasies" of upper-middle-class life while avoiding opportunities to discuss the real racial obstacles to elite class status for many black people. *Martin*, he suggests, presented distorted and silenced female images as the price required for black masculinity as domination. Tim Brown's chapter "Welcome to the Terrodome: Exploring the Contradictions of a Hip-Hop Black Masculinity" follows with a discussion of a highly publicized 2002 incident involving Allen Iverson. Brown demonstrates through an analysis of media coverage that the media reduced Iverson to the familiar stereotypes of black men as angry, violent, and sexually inappropriate. He suggests that the negative media attention in part was driven by ambivalence and hostility toward Iverson's hip-hop masculinity, a masculinity that has both progressive and regressive elements. He argues that despite racism and the society's tendency to denigrate blackness, that hip-hop is progressive in that it constructs an alternative identity that uncompromisingly uses and elevates blackness and black cultural practices, while also identifying with lower-class black life instead of white middle-class precepts. He suggest, however, that hip-hop is regressive because it imbibes and traffics in patriarchal and misogynist practices.

Part 6, "Black Feminist Engaged," discusses feminism in relationship to black masculinities. Phillips's chapter, the first in this part, is an excerpt from an earlier article she wrote in the 1990s.⁴⁵ I include it here because it examines the historical disagreement between black feminist and black male antiracist scholars over the competing claims that either black women are more oppressed than black men or that black men are more oppressed than black women. One claim asserts that women are doubly oppressed. The other, plays out in the trope "ain't nobody so free as a black woman and a white man." Phillips in "Beyond Competitive Victimhood: Abandoning Arguments that Black Women or Black Men Are Worse Off" focuses specifically on the feminist response, questioning it in relationship to ideas about gendered racism. Bahati Kuumba's chapter follows, explaining that the "promotion of progressive black masculinities is as necessary for achieving gender justice as is women's empowerment." Entitled, "Gender Justice: Linking Women's Human Rights and Progressive Black Masculinities," Kuumba suggests that black feminists have a stake in the development of progressive black masculinities. She then evaluates feminist approaches in engaging men in antisexist struggle in two specific institutional contexts, exposing the challenges in using feminist methods with men, as well as, interrogating the question of whether women's energies are best spent in this work.

The last part, "Walking the Talk," contemplates steps forward. Thema Bryant, in "Breaking the Silence: The Role of Progressive Black Men in the Fight against Sexual Assault" delineates the positions and steps progressive

black men have and should take with regard to rape. Using her poetry to drive home the point, she explains the common misconceptions about rape, including the fact that large numbers of men have been raped. She leaves us hopeful with black folks "speaking, rapping, singing, [and] preaching" against this human tragedy. Mark Anthony Neal's chapter, "Bringing Up Daddy: A Progressive Black Masculine Fatherhood?" ends the book on an inspiring note. At the center of his discussion are the loving stories about his daughter and his family's efforts to adopt a second child. Neal discusses such issues as father bias and nurturing in a patriarchal world and even the criminal allegations surrounding the musical icon R. Kelly, as he explores the various actions, issues, and concerns that might make one a profeminist, progressive black dad. His children, in addition to his work as a cultural analyst and scholar, provide him opportunities to engage the challenges of feminist ideas and progressive masculine practice in his life.

Notes

1. Eric Schlosser, "The Prison-Industrial Complex," *Atlantic Monthly* 282, no. 6 (December 1998); Loic Wacquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the Race Question in the U.S.," *New Left* 13 (January–February 2002).
2. Wacquant, "From Slavery."
3. See, for example, Marc Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate: Marc Mauer and the Sentencing Project* (New York: New Press, 1999).
4. Michael Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), noting that violence is a male activity.
5. Here I am thinking of the black nationalists of the late 1960s, particularly those who were a part of the black power phase. These include such activists as Eldridge Cleaver, Kwame Toure (formerly Stockley Carmichael), Amiri Baraka, Huey Newton, and H. Rap Brown. For a critique of some of this thinking see, e.g., bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 95–96, discussing Baraka. General histories on 1960s black nationalism see Robert L. Allen, *A Guide to Black Power in America: An Historical Analysis* (London: Gollancz, 1970), 18–74, 108–239; Theodore Draper, *The Rediscovery of Black Nationalism* (New York: Viking Press, 1970); Herbert H. Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954–1970* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 57–76; Alphonso Pinkney, *Red, Black, and Green: Black Nationalism in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 76–219; Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Norton, 1990), 222–61; and James Turner, "Black Nationalism: The Inevitable Response," *Black World*, January 1971, 4.
6. See, e.g., Richard Majors and others, "Cool Pose: A Symbolic Mechanism for Masculine Role Enactment and Coping by Black Males," in *American Black Male*, ed. Richard Majors and Jacob U. Gordon (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1994), 246, 251–56, explaining that the cool pose adopted by many young black men produces problems when used in certain social, sexual, and educational context.
7. For works that critique black nationalism in this manner, see, e.g., Michelle Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Verso Classics, 1979); hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 87–117; Bahati Kuumba, *Gender and Social Movements* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2001); and Barbara Ransby, "Afrocentrism, Cultural Nationalism, and the Problem with Essentialist Definitions of Race, Gender, and Sexuality," in *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience*, ed. Manning Marable (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), which critiques Afrocentricity.)
8. Ibid.
9. hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 87–117, which discusses the imperialism of patriarchy and Baraka's call for complementary and patriarchal roles for black women and men. The article also discusses the goals of the black power movement.
10. See, e.g., *ibid.*; Audre Lorde, "I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing across Sexualities," in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, ed. Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim (New York: Routledge, 2003), 255–59; Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984); Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin and Hyman, 1990); Adrienne Wing, ed., *Critical Race Feminism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought* (New York: New Press, 1995); Toni Morrison, ed., *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Pantheon/Random House, 1992); Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, 2 vols. (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1993); Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1984); hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983); and Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981).
11. See, e.g., Lorde, "I Am Your Sister."
12. Now many feminists have looked at masculinity. See Collins, *Black Sexual Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2004); hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, eds., *Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); and Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins, eds., *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men's History and Masculinity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). Also many black men recently have looked at masculinity as an aspect of male identity and the limitations it might pose. See, e.g., Devon Carbado, "The Construction of O.J. Simpson as a Racial Victim," in *Black Men on Race, Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Carbado (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 159–93; Michael Awkward, "You're Turning Me On": The Boxer, the Beauty Queen, and the Rituals of Gender," in *ibid.*, 128–46; Phillip Brian Harper, *Are We Not Men? Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African American Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Marcellus Blount and George Cunningham, eds., *Representing Black Men* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Ellis Cose, *A Man's World: How Real Is Male Privilege and How High Is Its Price?* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996); and Cose, *The Envy of the World: On Being a Black Man in America* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2002).
13. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Foreword," in Devon Carbado, *Black Men on Race, Gender, and Sexuality*, ed. Carbado (New York: New York University Press, 1999).
14. Ibid.
15. Shahrazad Ali, *The Blackman's Guide to Understanding the Blackwoman* (Philadelphia: Civilized Publications, 1989).
16. See, e.g., Earl Ofari Hutchinson, *The Assassination of the Black Male Image* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997); and Jawanza Kunjufu, *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*, vol. 4 (Chicago: African American Images, 1995).
17. See Carbado, *Black Men*.
18. Although the majority of these scholars identified as black, the conference participants overall were racially diverse with nonblack participants bringing particular issues of expertise, such as in masculinities studies, or with experience with comparative perspectives and coalitional building, such as members of LatCrit, a group of legal scholars focusing on the Latino condition. For instance, Michael Kimmel was invited to the conference as one of the leading scholars in the field of masculinities studies. Further, several LatCrit scholars were invited to bring a focus on coalition building and possibly a comparative perspective about Latino men.
19. Devon Carbado, *Black Men on Race, Gender, and Sexuality*, ed. Carbado (New York: New York University Press, 1999); also see, e.g., *The American Black Male*. Though most of the essays in the book were written by black men, it included a few women contributors and scholars from a variety of fields. As such it seemed to be more of a community approach.
20. Though many black feminists have talked about the intersection of race and gender, Crenshaw was one of the first women to articulate it as a theory in Crenshaw,

Part 1

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- "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989), 139–67.
21. Patricia Hill Collins was asked to present first on this question before the discussion was opened to the table.
 22. Molefi K. Asante, *Erasing Racism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003), 204.
 23. See, e.g., Ransby, "Afrocentrism, Cultural Nationalism, and the Problem with Essentialist Definitions of Race, Gender, and Sexuality," in *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience*, ed. Manning Marable (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 216–223. However, Ransby's critique seems to be based on the earlier work of Haki Muthubuti and Molefi Asante.
 24. Asante, *Afrocentricity* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988), 56.
 25. Madhubuti, *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? Afrikan American Families in Transition: Essays in Discovery, Solution, and Hope* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1990).
 26. Asante, *The Painful Demise of Eurocentrism: An Afrocentric Response to Critics* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999), 99, says, "Afrocentricity is considered dangerous because it indicts Eurocentrism as racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic."
 27. Asante, *Erasing Racism*.
 28. Ransby, "Afrocentrism," 220.
 29. Ibid.
 30. Jerome Schiele was asked to initially address this question but was unable to attend the workshop.
 31. Kendal Thomas provided the first response to this question. He is considered a critical race theorist and also has written a number of articles on the issue of gay black men.
 32. Athena D. Mutua, "The Rise of Critical Race Theory in Law," in *Race and Ethnic Handbook* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, forthcoming). An early version of this paper can be found at: <http://72.14.203.104/search?q=cache:i6HONnI54Dcj:222.law.buffalo.edu/baldycenter/pdfs/RacJusticeMutua05.pdf+Athena+Mutua&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=1>
 33. Ibid., citing Cheryl Harris.
 34. Ibid.
 35. Ibid.
 36. Ibid., citing Harris and Crenshaw.
 37. Ibid., citing Phillips.
 38. Ibid., discussing LatCrit as a body of scholarship related to critical race theory and articulating the principle of antiracism.
 39. Harry Brod, ed., *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987).
 40. Kimmel, "Foreword," in *Theorizing Masculinities*, ed. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), viii.
 41. Kaufman, "Men, Feminism, and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power," in Brod and Kaufman, *Theorizing Masculinities*, 156.
 42. Brod and Kaufman, eds., "Introduction," *Theorizing Masculinities*, 5.
 43. Darren Hutchinson, "Ignoring the Sexualization of Race: Heteronormativity, Critical Race Theory, and Anti-Racist Politics," *Buffalo Law Review* 47 (1999), 1–116; Francisco Valdes, "Queers, Sissies, Dykes and Tomboys: Deconstructing the Conflation of 'Sex,' 'Gender,' and 'Sexual Orientation,' in Euro-American Law and Society," *California Law Review* 83 (1995), 1–377; and Laurie Rose Kepros, "Queer Theory: Weed or Seed in the Garden of Legal Theory," *Law and Sex* 9 (1999–2000), 279–310.
 44. See Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982) for use of the term *prophetic Christianity*. The elements of prophetic Christianity include that every individual "should have an opportunity to fulfill his or her potentialities," given their equality before God, a belief in both the dignity as well as the depravity of people, and their imperfect ability to transform what is, as well as notions of freedom, democracy and hope. Ibid., 16–19; see also 101–8, which describes the prophetic Christian tradition in the African American experience calling it black theology.
 45. Stephanie Phillips, "Claiming Our Foremothers: The Legend of Sally Hemings and the Tasks of Black Feminist Theory," in *Hastings Women's Law Journal* 8 (Fall 1997), 401–65.

Theorizing Progressive Black Masculinities*

ATHENA D. MUTUA

My children, three boys, jump up from the table and swing into various dance modes. One of their favorite songs is on the radio. They sing along, 'I ain't sayin' she's a gold digger, but she ain't messin' with no broke, broke...' This is the clean version of Kanye West's song, "Gold Digger." The original lyrics say, "She ain't messin with no broke Niggas."

Kanye West is one of the more interesting Hip-Hop artists, to my mind. In addition to his music, he is probably best known for his comments during a nationally aired live benefit concert, Hurricane Katrina Relief, in 2005. He critiqued the government's slow response in rescuing what appeared to be mostly black people stranded in New Orleans after the hurricane. Commenting first on the media's negative portrayal of black hurricane survivors and noting his own ambivalent response, West concludes: "George Bush doesn't care about black people." In that moment it seemed that West, in taking on George Bush, the president of the United States and the epitome of American ideal masculinity, had destroyed his music career. But West had merely stated what had undoubtedly crossed the minds of many in black communities across the country.

However, this was not the first time that West had spoken out in a controversial manner. A couple of months before the Katrina Hurricane, he had chastised the hip-hop community for its homophobia. He stated that hip-hop was supposed to be about "speaking your mind and about breaking down barriers, but that everyone in hip-hop discriminates against gay people." Explaining that his cousin was gay and that he loved him, he called on his hip-hop friends to just "stop it."

My kids were singing loudly now, the song, for them, had reached its crescendo: "We want freedom, we want freedom," they sang, "Eighteen years, eighteen years. And on the 18th birthday he found out (the kid) wasn't his." I join the kids in singing and dancing. "No, No, I exclaim, he didn't want freedom, if he had wanted freedom, he would have covered it up!" The kids laugh and keep dancing. They have heard me make this point before, or something similar.

* I would like to thank Hank Richardson, Rebecca French, Isabel Marcus, Teresa Miller, and Makau Mutua for reading earlier versions of this paper and providing insightful comments.

"Don't nobody force you to be a father". Or, "No! At the crucial moment (of engaging in intercourse) he was probably thinking that somebody else was supposed to be responsible for his sexuality. Ya got to be responsible for your own sexuality," I had laughingly counseled; using the song as a valuable "teaching moment." It would be some time before we bought the CD and learned that the lyrics in that section of the song were not "we want freedom," but rather we want prenupt (prenuptial agreements)! Oh well.

Called by *Rolling Stone* magazine West's "ode to women 'who ain't messin' with no broke niggas,'" (February 9, 2006), the song is about a seemingly problematic woman, who only dates men with money, has a handful of kids by different men, and who (she or some other woman in the song) uses her child support to buy a nice car, etc. But, West, the singer, loves this woman. This strikes me as an interesting twist, loving someone who is not perfect, given that few of us are. But the song nevertheless disturbs me because it is among a number of songs and articles that seem to suggest that most women, and apparently black women in particular, are gold-diggers. Now, I am sure the response to such a claim would be that gold-diggers are real, are part of our reality, on the one hand, and that the songs and comments are not referring to all women but simply to some. Nevertheless, the repetition of this idea unsettles me even as I know there are far more sexist and misogynist lyrics and comments out there.

My boys, young teenagers, have now burnt off some of their incredible energy and finished raiding the kitchen for a snack; it's time for homework!

Still reflecting on the song, I believe that black men, like Kanye West, courageously rail against racial domination, recognizing that racism is a system which primarily operates in the American society to support a white supremacist social order that privileges whites and subordinates black people. But many of the same black men embrace sexism, a system that operates to support American patriarchy or male supremacy, privileging men and certain understandings of masculinity and subordinating women and those marked as feminine. In other words, black men struggle against white racial domination but embrace masculinist gender and sexual domination. Though Kanye West seems to bring to the scene a more nuanced understanding of oppression, I wonder how many other black men get it... that is, do they understand that patriarchy and white supremacy are mutually reinforcing structures of domination that have complicated and negative consequences for black women but also for black men. And, I wonder if do they know that when black men embrace the patriarchy, they, among other things, undermine our struggle for racial justice.

In this chapter, I propose a definition of progressive black masculinities as the unique and innovative performances of the masculine self that on the one hand personally eschew and ethically and actively stand against social structures of domination.¹ On the other hand, they validate and empower black humanity, in all its variety, as part of the diverse and multicultural humanity of others in the global family. I argue that this definition is grounded in the twin concepts of

progressive blackness and *progressive masculinities*. I suggest that both of these are political projects committed to eradicating relations of domination that constrain and reduce human potential. However, each project is directed toward different but overlapping groups of people—black people and men—and focuses on different systems of domination. The project of progressive blackness centers on the edification and empowerment of black people as part of a larger antiracist struggle and part of a still larger antidomination or antisubordination project. The project of progressive masculinities is similar but centers its efforts on reorienting men's concepts and practices away from ideal masculinity, which, by definition, requires the domination of men over women, children, and, yes, other subordinated, or "weaker" men as Patricia Hill Collins examines.

Black men are the focal point of this project. I suggest two basic points in discussing these projects. First that black men's embrace of ideal masculinity not only hurts black women, but also hurts black men and black communities as a whole. Second, I suggest that black men are not only oppressed by racism but that their oppression is gendered. In other words, they are oppressed by gendered racism.

The first part of this chapter lays out my tentative definition of progressive black masculinities. It then explores the ethical component of the project of progressive blackness. Specifically, through references to work by Cornel West on the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas hearings and Michael Dyson on comments made by Bill Cosby, I argue that the project of progressive blackness is an ethical project. In other words, it is a principled commitment to the existential well-being, both materially and spiritually, of black people and black communities in their entirety, including their various constituent groups. To the extent that different parts of these communities, such as black women, poor blacks, or black sexual minorities, are constrained by different or multiple systems of domination, such as sexism, classism, or heterosexism, a commitment to the project of progressive blackness entails efforts to also transform these. As such, progressive blackness is a project to transform all systems of domination and to build coalitions with others who are ethically and actively committed not only to the struggle against racism but also to the struggle against domination and subordination in general.

I then note that the workings of American ideal, or hegemonic, masculinity are a hindrance to progressive masculine practice. The section on the American Masculine Ideal, therefore seeks to explain in some detail what the masculine ideal is, how it operates as part of the sex-gender system, the way in which men are socialized into it, and its relationship to the patriarchal order as a site of power. Here I argue that the central feature of masculinity is the domination and oppression of others; namely women, children, and other subordinated men. The section draws on insights from feminist theory, masculinities studies, and gay and queer theory as a way of defining the project of progressive masculinities.

The second part of the chapter analyzes a number of theories that seek to answer the question of where black men stand in relationship to hegemonic masculinity given their subjugation by racial oppression. Are they privileged by gender or oppressed by gender? Here the case is made that they both benefit and are disadvantaged by gender. The focus is the gendered racial oppression of black men. Specifically, the section looks at three theories. One theory examines the material conditions of black men in America and suggests that racism precludes black men from enjoying any of the unearned privileges associated with masculinity and in fact often precludes black men from enjoying the privileges of full personhood, personal competence, and humanity. But a careful analysis of this theory suggests that black men likely are oppressed because they are both black and men; that is, black men are oppressed by gendered racism whether or not they benefit as men in some form under the patriarchal order.

The second theory, intersectionality, applied to black men, is cognizant of black male conditions but also explores black men's status in relationship to black women to posit that black men are privileged by gender and oppressed by race. It too obscures the insight that black men may be constrained by gendered racism but adequately captures some of the situations of differential power between black men and black women. The third theory, multidimensionality, recognizes that black men are not homogeneous but rather are diverse by class, sexuality, religion, and other systems of subordination. It suggests that given the interconnectedness of patriarchy/sexism and racism, among other oppressive systems, black men, as a single multidimensional positionality, are in some contexts privileged by gender and sometimes oppressed by gendered racism. It also suggests that when the interconnectedness of multiple oppressive systems is ignored it undermines antiracist efforts.

The final parts of the chapter suggest reasons why black men should want to engage in a project of progressive black masculinities. It looks at the political and intellectual projects of various groups concerned with the welfare of black people including black nationalism; Afrocentricity; black feminist thought; black gay and lesbian, critical race theory; and black transformationist⁶ ideas as well as relying on the experiential knowledge and history of black people. It suggests that to the extent black men are committed to the antiracist project of blackness, this project has always been concerned with the existential wholeness and well-being of black communities and black people. This well-being requires the promotion of black self determination, black self-love and appreciation and recognizes black agency, viewpoint—despite its diversity—and humanity in the context of a racist society inclined toward denigrating, humiliating, and limiting black humanity. This commitment is to the well-being of all of the constituent parts of black communities. These ideas bring the two sides of my definition of progressive black masculinities together. The last section of the chapter explores what it means concretely to be ethically

and actively engaged in the progressive struggle of the sort contemplated by the project of progressive black masculinities.

Progressive Black Masculinities—Defined?

Simply stated, progressive black masculinities, on the one hand, personally eschew and actively stand against social structures of domination and, on the other, value, validate, and empower black humanity in all its variety as part of the diverse and multicultural humanity of others in the global family. More specifically, progressive black masculinities are, at a minimum, pro-black and antiracist as well as profeminist and antisexist. Further, they are male affirmative,⁷ recognizing the humanity of men as men and rejecting early feminist formulations suggesting that men qua men are the enemy in the antisexist struggle. But progressive black masculinities are more than this. They are decidedly not dependent and are not predicated on the subordination of others. They instead promote human freedom for all, both in the context of their personal lives and in the outward manifestations of those personal lives in social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. As such, combining both *progressive blackness* and *progressive masculine* practice, progressive black masculinities are men who take an active and ethical stance against all social systems of domination and who act personally and in concert with others in activities against racism, sexism, homophobia and heterosexism, class and economic exploitation, imperialism, and other systems of oppression that limit the human potential of the black masculine self and others. This is challenging given normative—ideal and hegemonic—masculinity.

Progressive Blackness: An Ethical Project

Although many black people can be reactionary and there are any number of ways in which blackness and black culture can be employed in conservative, essentialist, and other counterproductive ways, I presume that most blacks abhor racism. That is, they stand against the racial domination and subordination of blacks that limit black agency and humanity. As Cornel West has so eloquently stated, “After centuries of racist degradation, exploitation, and oppression in America, being black means being minimally subject to white supremacist abuse and being a part of a rich culture and community that has struggled against such abuse. All people with black skin and African phenotype are subject to potential white supremacist abuse [and hence] have some interest in resisting racism—even if their interest is confined solely to themselves as individuals rather than to larger black communities.”⁸

However, to be progressively black means something more than this. It recognizes that white supremacy is not just a belief system or an ideology but a structural system in which the ideology of white supremacy is deeply written into the conscious and unconscious patterns of people's behavior and into the very systems, institutions, and structures of American society.

Built on the extermination of large populations of Native Americans and the expropriation of their land; the enslavement, oppression, and exploitation of blacks; the subordination of Latinos and appropriation of portions of their land; and the initial exclusion of Asians as citizens all in an effort to create a white state,⁹ the cultural value of white supremacy has been cultivated and institutionalized over several hundred years. This cultural value is so pervasive throughout society that whiteness is both the obvious and hidden norm against which most things are measured and is preferred in institutional settings that perpetuate themselves even in the absence of overt or conscious racist intent.¹⁰ So for example, conversations about good schools often revolve around private or suburban schools, both of which code as white schools—not because black schools are inherently inferior but because a history of slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, government housing policies, and white flight have left “good” schools as “white” schools. To change this dynamic requires active intervention to disrupt the normal functioning of a society built on white supremacist foundations.

Progressive blackness therefore is this intervention. It is the ethical and active participation in antiracist struggles from the standpoint of black self identity and black communities’ well-being. It intervenes to disrupt the normal economic, cultural, social, and political workings of white supremacy and consciousness. Latinaness, Native Americaness, Asian Americaness, and even European Americaness, among others, may also be projects meant to intervene and disrupt the normal psychological and institutionalized operations of white supremacy.

Ethical participation in antiracist struggles insists that the struggles not be dependent on or committed to the subordination of others. In addition it requires that participants be conscious of the relationships among “identities, class, culture, gender, sexual orientation, region, religion, age and the like.”¹¹

So for instance, within black communities, West critiqued as unethical what he calls racial reasoning, the practice of blacks ritually supporting particular black people simply because they are black without interrogating their commitments. He particularly criticized black leaders’ initial response to the Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill hearings as unethical in part because although Thomas and Hill were black, black leaders failed to interrogate what they stood for in terms of the well-being of various black communities. Both of these people, according to West, supported “some of the most vicious policies to besiege black working and poor communities since Jim and Jane Crow segregation.” He explained, “Both Thomas and Hill supported an unprecedented redistribution of wealth from working people to well-to-do people in the form of regressive taxation, deregulation policies, cutbacks and slowdowns in public service programs, take-backs at the negotiation table between worker and management, and military buildup at the Pentagon. Both ... supported the unleashing of unbridled capitalist market forces on a level

never witnessed in the United State before that have devastated black working and poor communities.”¹²

Further, racial reasoning in this instance was dependent on the subordination of black women. That is, it showed itself to be sexist and exclusionary, demonstrating a willingness to define the interest of the black community as corresponding to a narrow individual black male interest to the exclusion and suppression of those of black women. West thus criticized black leadership for failing to challenge Thomas’s comment about his biological sister that reduced her to a stereotypical welfare cheat and their dismissal of Hill’s sexual harassment claims. Hill’s claims marked a departure from her otherwise “careerist addicted to job promotion [attitude which was] captive to the stereotypical self-image of the sacrificial black woman who suffers silently and alone.”¹³

Thomas’s comment about his sister as a welfare cheat also reveals the way cultural stereotypes often employ multiple systems of oppression to exact their sting. The welfare cheat is not simply a sexist comment but is also a racist one. Though it was meant to denigrate a black woman specifically, it nonetheless reinforced stereotypes about both women and blackness as lazy and as cheaters. Thus, Thomas unethically and for the purpose of his own individual aggrandizement sought bonding among men by trafficking in sexist discourse that also reinforced oppressive notions of blackness even while he misused the memory of black lynching.

Michael Dyson, too, commented on blackness as an ethical and political project. He recently challenged the ethics of Bill Cosby in using his celebrity and professional status to castigate the black community’s most vulnerable members. Dyson charged that Cosby did so without articulating or even recognizing the structured oppressions that keep black people poor, such as policies promoting their imprisonment rather than their education or explaining the resistance to oppression implicit in a variety of their cultural practices.¹⁴ As such, Cosby’s comments were destructive and could be used by the racist right wing to justify further limiting poor black people’s access to resources. Cosby castigated black youth for failing to stay in school, for failing to learn standard English and for engaging in activities that result in their incarceration. He further castigated black parents for not adequately parenting their young. Finally, he commented that “lower economic and lower middle economic people [were] not holding up their end in this deal.” Dyson suggested that Cosby’s comments were particularly problematic and of questionable ethics, not because whites could misuse Cosby’s comments, or because Cosby should not express his beliefs, but rather because, according to Dyson, Cosby had long refused to put that same status and professional success to use in the service of black communities well-being.¹⁵

Cosby’s comments seem far less egregious than the racial reasoning employed in the context of Clarence Thomas and his Supreme Court nomination. Further, Dyson’s criticism implicates the complicated issue of needed self-critique within black communities and the idea of cultural

democracy (and thus dissent) that a project of progressive black masculinities embraces. Nonetheless, Dyson's criticism illustrates the link between ethics and community welfare.

In addition, here again two systems of domination were employed to make the cultural stereotype work. This time elitist comments reflecting class position—perhaps inadvertently—blame the poor for their own poverty and, though directed specifically against poor blacks, also suggest that black people in general are to blame for their own oppressed conditions. They thereby reinforce both classist and racist stereotypes.

Whether one agrees with Dyson's assessment of Cosby's career or not, the larger point becomes one of an ethical and active engagement in antiracist struggle that is not dependent on the subordination of others and is in pursuit of the expressive and material well-being of the entire community in all its variation. This variation includes black subgroups that are differentiated by class, sex, gender, sexuality, age, region, religion, and culture,¹⁶ and particularly those differences on which structures of oppression have been erected. These structurally oppressed differences also serve as links, along with principled commitments, to other groups as potential coalitional partners.¹⁷

Exploring the subgroups that constitute black communities leads to three other insights that contribute to the definition of the project of progressive blackness: (1) The social construction of race, of which blackness is a part, is multidimensional; (2) the active stand against other forms of domination is the ethical extension of progressive black practice; and (3) coalition building against domination, not only with those within black communities but also with those outside of them, completes the ethical project of progressive black practice.

To the first insight, focusing on the subgroups within black communities, such as black women, black sexual minorities—some of which are women—or black Muslims, provides the insight that black identity is multidimensional. Black people are not just raced black but also are of different genders, sexes, classes, and religions, among others. Second, to the extent that members of black communities occupy identities that are structurally subordinated by other systems of domination such as class, gender, and sexuality, these systems also should be the focus of black antiracist struggle. This is so for two reasons. These other systems of domination should be a focus of black antiracist struggle because some black people's agency is constrained and affected by them. But second, given that these struggles, like the antiracist struggle, are based on claims that domination limits human potential, an ethical and principled position requires support of struggles also against these systems of domination.

Finally, as black subgroups find common ground with others with whom they share principled commitments and perhaps similar subordinated statuses, progressive blackness encourages coalition building around these issues. So for instance, black communities should stand against sexism because sexism limits the life chances of some members of the black community: black

women. Thus, black women and other members of black communities should build coalitions with women generally who are committed to principles of antiracism and antisexism as limiting systems of subordination.

Seen from a different perspective, race itself also should be understood as multidimensional. That is, race, in which blackness is a project of black self-definition and in which whiteness has historically been a project of supremacy, can be understood as a system socially constructed on the basis of different types of human bodies.¹⁸ This racial system assigns meanings to these different types of human bodies that justify and influence allocations of status and resources, both material and expressive, in a manner that privileges white people and whiteness and disadvantages black people and blackness, among others.¹⁹ Racism operates and is bolstered through the economy, education system, religion, and other social systems and institutions and intersects with other systems of domination such as class, gender, and sex. To the extent that racism interacts with other systems of sexism, classism, and heterosexism, it is multidimensional. To eliminate racism, eliminating the other systems of oppression is likely necessary. At the same time, similar insights can be garnered from looking at racism as part of a larger system, which bell hooks refers to as the "White supremacist capitalist patriarchy"²⁰ and Francisco Valdes calls "the Euro-American Heteropatriarchy."²¹

Many of these ideas implicate the issue of black communities' very identities, including what it means to be black in the United States both as an individual matter and as communities, as well as, what the appropriate strategies (e.g., race consciousness, colorblindness) are for their affirmation. I return to this discussion later in this chapter, delving deeper into the discussion of progressive blackness as a political project. Suffice it to say for now that with regard to the appropriate strategies black people should pursue, though many of us who participated in the progressive black masculinities project viewed black identity as multiple, multilayered, and various²² and the black community as multiple or imagined, most took a race-conscious approach.²³ This approach of race consciousness, or intentional blackness, seems particularly necessary as a social and political move because of the normativity of whiteness, where whiteness is assumed and in any event preferred as the standard. Such assumptions often negate or denigrate black experiences, black cultural traditions, black viewpoints—despite their variety—and black humanity, promoting instead their destruction or assimilation into whiteness as the price for admission into American citizenship and the privilege of humanness.

However, though one could assume that systematic racism might potentially spur progressive black practice, this seems less true for masculinity. Whereas blackness responds to and critiques racial domination, masculinity as a way of being and as currently practiced constitutes a social and political institution of domination. That is, it is defined, understood, believed, and practiced as domination over others. To the questions "What is a man? What is masculinity?"

the response is nothing if he is not in control of, in charge of, and dominates over everything else in his environment, including his own emotions, physical environments, women, children, and yes, other subordinate men.²⁴

Whereas masculinity could of course be defined as caring and heroic, providing and sustaining, and ultimately humane, domination over others nonetheless is the central feature prevailing in notions and practices of normative masculinity in the United States. In fact, masculinity as domination is hegemonic.²⁵ That is, as a practiced understanding it is so pervasive that it rules over, suppresses, limits, and excludes other visions of masculinity through both coercion and complicity of all those involved. Further, like elite class domination and white racial power, masculinity as domination is structured and supported by the full range of social structures, including governmental, economic, religious, educational, media, and familial structures. These systems of domination—of race, class, and patriarchy—interact with one another and limit the human potential of groups over whom domination is exercised,²⁶ as each constitutes a site of power.

The American Masculine Ideal—Hegemonic Masculinity

The *masculine ideal* as feminists have shown, is informed by binary and dichotomous thinking that is endemic to Western thought. It is evidenced by common dualities such as white–black, good–evil, male–female, heterosexual–homosexual, and mind–matter.²⁷ These dualities are not equal but are hierarchical, with the first category representing the positive and preferred positionality and the second the undesirable and corrupted position.²⁸ Masculinity, the positive side of the male–female, man–woman dichotomy, is thus defined both as opposing and superior to the feminine. This duality is reflected in the traits supposedly confined to each category. Masculinity embodies socially valued traits. Men are to be strong, active, aggressive, reasoned, dominant, competitive, and in control. Femininity embodies the less socially valued traits. Women are to be weak, passive, receptive, emotional, nurturing, and subordinate.²⁹ These *cultural ideas*, as masculinities scholars insist, “don’t describe women and men as they actually are,”³⁰ nor do they recognize that the ways “people feel and behave depends more on the social situation they’re in than it does on some rigid set of underlying traits that define them in every circumstance.”³¹ These cultural ideas, instead, inform the ideal of masculinity in the American sex–gender system, which both feminists and masculinities scholars agree is backed by institutional and systemic power that rewards and penalizes those closest to the norm.

The Sex–Gender System The sex–gender system basically says that men and women have both social and sexual roles. In these roles, which are related to the oppositional traits and are both hierarchal and complementary, men are to control their families and run the public world; women are to follow the

masculine lead and to organize the private household.³² Sexually, men are to be attracted to women, active in their pursuit of wealth and women, and active and penetrating in the world and in bed. Women, on the other hand, are to be attracted and attractive to men and passive and receptive both socially and sexually to men. A neat package, this system precludes and denigrates same-sex relations as deviant, devalued, and outside the preferred system. It is captured in the dichotomous thinking of the heterosexual–homosexual binary.³³ Further, intersexed people—those born with both female and male biological features—are to be changed surgically into male or female so that they can grow into men or women.³⁴

Therefore, ideal masculinity is defined in opposition not only to women but also to homosexuality. A real man cannot be either feminine or gay. The ideal is also racialized and classed. Men are to be empowered, to be provided opportunities to fulfill their roles as leader and provider, and to be ensured dominance. This translates into policies that provide men the best and most key opportunities in the social world while circumscribing women’s opportunities and human development to allow men the preferred positions. U.S. society has operated historically to provide this access to only certain men: those raced white and those who possess property. The boundaries surrounding race- and class-based privilege, though, have changed over time, as have the boundaries of manhood. For example, whiteness initially included primarily white Anglo-Saxon Protestant men. However, with immigration of a variety of ethnic groups from Europe, whiteness was expanded to also include men within these groups.³⁵ Further, initially only propertied men were provided certain privileges.³⁶ However, as Cheryl Harris argued, whiteness became a form of property, thereby expanding the group of white people.³⁷ In addition, the economic order expanded to make more men propertied, though this trend may be reversing. And finally, other changes have affected these boundaries. For instance, Clyde W. Franklin II, has argued that black men were considered boys until the 1960s, when they became nominal men.³⁸

Nevertheless, the ideal man is currently an elite white heterosexual male. This is not a person but an ideal. And a man’s masculinity is measured by how close he comes to the ideal. Though this ideal is dominant or hegemonic, it is not the only idea of masculinity. In fact, through the lived experiences of people and their interactions with their societies, multiple ideas and practices emerge to constitute masculinity differently over time and space.

Current ideal masculinity is the product of social processes prevailing in twenty-first-century America. It is different from the white rural estate-owning “genteel patriarch” of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century or the urban “heroic artisan” of the same period,³⁹ both of which have whiteness at their center. From this perspective, masculinity—both ideal masculinity and its multiple variations—is socially constructed, constantly changing, and dependent on time and place. It is not biologically determined; rather, as a

gender concept, it is what we as a culturally specific community—both as a collective and as individuals—make of the biological difference between male and female. These concepts shift over time and also differ within cultures among various subgroups that construct distinct masculinities in response to the ways social processes act on them. As such, both individuals and groups have some agency in defining masculinity. However, neither groups nor individuals define and construct masculinities in a vacuum. Rather, they draw on other culturally prevalent notions and are constrained by various social structures. Further, much of what is defined as masculine within a group is both internalized and enacted as much as constructed and chosen.

Thus, although half of the children born are born male or remade into males, they are not born men.⁴⁰ Rather, they grow into men, learning the social expectations and cultural ideas of what a man is.

Socialization: Constructing Masculine Identity

My sons and I stop at a fast food restaurant along Route 15, somewhere in the middle of Pennsylvania. I am driving from our home in Buffalo to my parents' home in Baltimore. As they usually do, the boys are spending their spring break with their grandparents. As we enter the restaurant and the boys take off to the men's room, I notice a sign advertising a men's conference.

The conference is titled, "Training to Reign," and features a lion in the middle of the poster with a crown on the lion's head. There is much in this poster to critique. Instead however, I try to think of positive interpretations of it. As the poster attempts to appeal to everyday men, I change the word reign to lead. Lead sounds more democratic, to my mind, and one can certainly lead in everyday life. In fact, my sister-in-law chastises her twin sons by asking them whether they are leaders or followers when they are apparently following each other's lead in inappropriate action instead of each figuring out for himself more appropriate behavior.

My fourteen-year-old son emerges first from the bathroom, interrupting my thoughts. "Look," I say, "look at this sign." He quickly reads it, dismissively noting, "Hum, talking about male supremacist," as he moseys over to the ordering counter. Having in that instance made my concentrated efforts at positively interpreting the poster seem ridiculous, I reply, startled, "Male supremacist? I didn't know you knew such a phrase." "Oh Mom," he moans, "I'm not completely oblivious." I turn away as the smile spreads across my face. "That's my boy!" I think. "That's my child... that boy is the son of his parents...of his community? My heart warms, "perhaps his father and I have done at least one thing right? Perhaps young black men already know this stuff and there is hope for the world, after all."

Ian Harris, a masculinities scholar, explained that young boys are socialized to meet society's expectations of them and are "rewarded by their parents and teachers for conforming to gender-role standards ... [and] congratulated by their peers for performing like men. Mentors pat them on the back for their

'masculine' achievements."⁴¹ In his study of 560 men, Harris distilled some two dozen types of dominate male gender norms or messages that boys or men hear about how men are supposed to behave. Many of these messages are conflicting and have dubious outcomes when enacted; many support idealized masculinity. These messages include men as adventurer, breadwinner, playboy, president, sportsman, tough guy, and warrior or instruct men to be the best they can, to be in control, to be self-reliant, to be stoic, or to make money—"a man is judged by how much money he makes or his status on the job." Harris argued that gender identity is the combination of biology on which dominant cultural norms, subcultural influences, and unique circumstances are imposed and constructed.⁴² Children internalize dominant social norms but also internalize the norms of their specific subgroups. He explained, "Children who internalize social norms become cultural natives ... Boys from different subcultures—classes, kinship networks, ethnic groups, regional enclaves, religious communities—view the dominant ideology for masculinity with different lenses. From these perspectives, they construct complex gender identities full of idiosyncratic interpretations ... that contain common threads derived from dominant cultural norms and subculture influences."⁴³

Franklin described the socialization process in a similar fashion but included peer groups as a significant socializing factor for youth entering the first phase of adult life. He suggested that the three most important socializing sources for children are the subculture group (the primary socializing factor), the peer group, and mainstream society. He posited that the contradictory messages in each make for the formation of complex identities. Thus, although men are greatly influenced by societal messages of what it means to be a man, their gender identity, as Harris notes, "can be conceived as [an individual] interpretation and acting out of how his social group interprets masculinity."⁴⁴ That is, men play a role in constructing their masculinity. Thus, from the time men are children, they are both shaped by and construct their identities as part of the socialization process and as part of various social groups.

Many of the messages men hear about what it means to be a man, particularly those associated with ideal masculinity, may be harmful to them and psychologically and socially problematic. For instance, the messages men hear often counsel them to suppress their emotions. This advice may result in alienating men from their own conscience and feelings, possibly leaving them conflicted, empty, and hard and leading to other antisocial consequences. Further, men may also be harmed by the narrow, limited, and restrictive roles they are told to play. Some suggest that women in some ways, despite restricted access to social opportunities and resources, currently may have an easier time constructing their identities because they are allowed a wider range of traits, roles, and ways of *being* that may better reflect them—who they are or who they want to be. In contrast, men, though often having greater access to more material resources and opportunities, arguably may be much

more limited in their human expression of themselves because they have more narrow traits, roles, and messages about how to *be* from which to draw on in constructing their identities. This state of affairs may be more harmful to black men—and poor black men in particular—because they have less access to economic, social, and institutional resources and opportunities and are also subject to a range of disempowering and distorted stereotypes against which they must operate. Thus, to the extent that they internalize messages urging them to construct identities that conform to ideal masculinity, they may have even fewer resources to do so, and even fewer resources on which to construct healthy life-affirming and personally competent identities. This may lead to male identities based on more physical assertions and prowess involving physical toughness, violence, or sexuality, given the other social constraints. Some of these constrained expressions in turn often become the basis for both legitimate and illegitimate criticism and penalty.

Ideal Masculinity as Domination Masculinity, nevertheless, is a site of power. Power is a social phenomenon, the relations of which are institutionalized throughout the economic, political, and social area and to which compliance is enforced through penalties and rewards as well as legal and extralegal violence. Commenting on racial power, Harold Cruse noted that although America “idealizes the rights of the individual above everything else,” the fact is that the “nation is dominated by the social power of groups, classes, in-groups and cliques—both ethnic and religious.” He goes on to note, “The individual in America has few rights that are not backed up by the political, economic and social power of one group or another. Hence the individual Negro has, proportionately, very few rights indeed because his ethnic group (whether or not he actually identifies with it) has very little political, economic or social power (beyond moral grounds) to wield.”⁴⁵

Philosopher Hannah Arendt also commented on this idea, explaining that power is a collective phenomenon, something an individual can have only if society provides it. She explained, “Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but also to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is ‘in power’ we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with ... disappears, ‘his power’ also vanishes.”⁴⁶

Gender, the structure of which masculinity is a part, is a description then not so much of the roles and traits of men and women but rather “of the actual social relations of power between men and women, institutionalized in society and internalized to varying degrees by its individuals.” It is “socially structured and individually embodied.”⁴⁷ Patriarchy describes the structure of men’s social power that privileges and benefits men over women⁴⁸ but that

does not privilege all men equally. Michael Kaufman noted that even though power can be understood as the human ability to develop human capacities, it is more often understood as the capacity to impose control over others and over material resources.⁴⁹ He explained that “in societies based on hierarchy and inequality ... people cannot use and develop their capacities to an equal extent ... [Rather, one has power if one] can take advantage of differences between people”⁵⁰ The equation of masculinity with power is one that developed over centuries. It conformed to, and in turn justified, the real-life domination of men over women and the valuation of males over females. Individual men internalize all this into their developing personalities.”⁵¹

Domination over others is one of the central understandings and practices of masculinity. Stated differently, normative masculinity is predicated on the domination of others. It relies on male group power to empower and to provide unearned privileges to those that come within its ambit, namely males, but provides greater privileges to those who come closest to the established or ideal norm. It thereby seduces men into compliance with its promise of greater privilege vis-à-vis the other, whether women, gay men, or countless others differentiated by race, class, ethnicity, age, or nationality. Further, it not only requires domination over others but also is defined in relationship to and in opposition to others.

This domination is exercised through the entire range of social institutions and systems and employs specifically the tools of the economy, cultural representation, and violence, both legal and nonlegal,⁵² to exclude, to exploit, to marginalize, and to disempower women as well as certain other men.⁵³ Further, men’s use of these tools is justified in relationship to the traits often assigned to masculinity such as physical strength, public action, economic control, sexual domination, and aggressiveness. Men’s justified dominion over these tools and the prescription of domination in general imbue masculinity with an association with violence and contribute to a culture of male-enacted violence. For an example, the high incidence of domestic violence by men against women may indicate that men are using violence to try to control and dominate over their partners. Minimizing sanctions for this violence, in law for example, may indicate the society’s tolerance for this type of behavior.

For an economic example, a department store was recently sued for allegedly steering women into lower paying positions. Such steering ensures that men occupy the vast majority of decision-making and higher paying positions within the store, and to the extent that steering, and a variety of other practices which frustrate women’s advancement, are replicated throughout the society, it may well result in men exercising financial control in their individual families. It is clear that men constitute the vast majority of the politicians, judges, captains of industry and highest paid workers. These institutional practices are encouraged by the sex/gender

ideologies that suggest that women should stay at home, are not responsible for their families, or are never interested in good-paying jobs or career advancement.

These ideas inform the contours and the struggles implicit in the project of progressive masculinities. This project is about reorienting male practices and performances of masculinity to eschew domination as a central feature. Further, it requires the active support and edification by men of those against whom masculine domination has been exercised, including women, sexual minorities, and other men subordinated by race, class, and other systems of subordination. In short, it requires action to transform the institution of masculinity as a system of domination.

Given this understanding of hegemonic masculinity and the project of progressive masculinities, where do black men fit? What can be said of black masculinities, which are constrained, at a minimum, by racism and certainly markets and are therefore something less than dominant? And further, though some black men are clearly progressive by the definition already provided, what would it mean for more black men to practice progressive black masculinities, and why, given the privileges of masculinity, would they want to?

Theoretical Positionings of Black Men in Ideal Masculinity

Where do black men fit in all of this? Some scholars suggest that racism precludes black men from exercising and in any way benefiting from the privileges of masculinity; from being “real men” (apparently as defined by ideal masculinity). They do so by looking at the lived conditions of black men. But this analysis nonetheless implies that black men are oppressed because they are both black and men; that is oppressed by gendered racism. The idea of gendered racism accounts for representations, or stereotypes, and practices directed toward black men because they are both black and men.

Others argue that black men, at the intersection of race and gender, are oppressed by race but are privileged by gender, by which they understand black men to be privileged over women and particularly over black women. They compare not only the conditions of black men to black women but also the relationships between black men and black women. Although the theory in some ways obscures the impact of gendered racism against black men, I suggest that intersectional theory can be interpreted in a more nuanced fashion that recognizes that black men in some contexts benefit from unearned privileges in this patriarchal society but are nonetheless sometimes oppressed by gender and race in the form of gendered racism. Ultimately, I argue for a multidimensional understanding of black men as a single social position—*blackmen, one word*—and under which black men are both sometimes privileged by gender and oppressed by gendered racism, often in different contexts.

Black Male Conditions in the U.S.: Gender Privilege?

Some scholars, including Afrocentric scholars, can be read to suggest that because black men are oppressed by race, they are in no position to benefit from the privileges afforded men under a patriarchal sex-gender system that oppresses women and others in part to benefit men. They point to the fact that black men are economically subordinated in segmented and separated job markets that leave them in much lower-paying jobs than whites and often leave them unemployed outright. Though black women are also segmented into lower-paying jobs, it is argued they may be able to find jobs and may do so increasingly given the changing nature of the economy. The economy is adding more lower wage service jobs and is losing the manufacturing jobs that historically employed mostly men and paid them higher wages. They also point to the fact that black men are disproportionately and increasingly incarcerated, leaving them warehoused in the nation's prisons and thereafter deprived of opportunities to provide for themselves and their families. Further, they argue that black men have been culturally stigmatized in a way that justifies their increased surveillance, subjects them to the microaggressions of clutched purses and profiling that psychologically injure and constrain them, and dismisses and lowers expectations of their humanity. These same conditions are experienced by black boys, resulting in higher suspension rates from schools and disproportionate placement in special education programs, which among other things render them increasingly less educated and less likely to grow into productive men. These arguments are borne out by the following facts:

Black men have the lowest life expectancy rate of any group within the United States.⁵⁴

Black male suicide rates doubled between 1980 and 1995, constituting the third leading cause of death among black men.⁵⁵

Black men have the highest rate of diabetes among all men. Cardiovascular ailments prematurely kill four of every ten black men.⁵⁶

Homicide is even more problematic than disease; in 1998 black men represented seven of ten murder victims.⁵⁷

Using 1998 figures, black men earned on average seventy-one cents for every dollar earned by white men. College graduates do better, earning seventy-two cents for every dollar earned by comparable white graduates. (Black women earned about seventy-six cents for every dollar black men earned. Even of college graduates, black women's median income was 87 percent of black men's earnings.)⁵⁸

As of 2003, black male teens experienced the lowest employment ratios (i.e., employment relative to population) in fifty years, at less than 20 percent.⁵⁹ It has not been this low since the historic decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

- The period between 2000 and 2002 saw the year-round idleness, where blacks did not work at all during the year, at 21 percent for black males of almost all ages, 20–64, compared to 12 percent for Asian men and 10 percent for white men. 44 percent of black men without high school diplomas or a GED were idle for the entire year.⁶⁰
- Employment rates for young, less-educated black males are much lower than for whites and lower in cities than in suburbs, the gap widening over the last decade.⁶¹ These mark the spatial inequalities wrought by the city/suburban split of segregated living and the increasing isolation of black populations.⁶²
- Nationwide, black men were incarcerated 9.6 times the rate of white men. Other studies suggest that 12 percent of black men between twenty and thirty-four years of age are in jail or prison compared to only 1.6 percent of white men of similar age. And 28 percent of black men can expect to be imprisoned during their lifetimes.⁶³

These statistics confirm conditions of deprivation for many black men and represent not only blocked opportunities for black men in terms of realizing ideal masculinity and its proscriptions to be providers but also their lack of opportunities to become productive and contributing members of society. These conditions also hinder men in developing the self-esteem that is often associated with work. Work may not only provide an opportunity for people to make a living but may provide also a sense of competence and self-fulfillment.

However, whereas Afrocentrics and others analyze these problems as resulting primarily from the racist structure of the society, their focus on black men belies their emphasis. That is, their focus illustrates that black men are not only oppressed by racism but also may be harmed by the gender oppression implicit in the notion of gendered racism. Further, these conditions do not mean that black men are not in many ways privileged by the patriarchal sex-gender system through the operation of sexism and gender oppression nor does it mean there are no representations of black men as masculine. Rather, as Franklin suggested, multiple forms of black masculinities exist. These have adapted in, varying degrees, to the realization that black men's opportunities to attain ideal masculinity have been blocked. He described them as follows:

"Conformist Black masculinity," which "continue[s] to accept mainstream society's prescriptions and proscriptions for heterosexual males";⁶⁴
 "Ritualistic Black masculinity,"⁶⁵ which recognizes blocked opportunities but continues to "play the game" without believing or really questioning it;
 "Innovative Black masculinity," which "exaggerates one aspect of traditional masculinity which *can* be achieved in order to receive desired responses."⁶⁶ He referred to some of the rap music that denigrates women and is sexually explicit but achieves the desired goal of material

success as nonthreatening examples of this type of masculinity. Violent, drug-dealing masculinities are examples of more lethal ones.

"Retreatist Black masculinity," which has "grown weary of participating in a system that denies the means for achieving common goals"⁶⁷ and as such, has opted out through such things as drugs, homelessness, welfare dependency;
 "Rebellious masculinity," which rejects the dominating precepts of American ideal masculinity.⁶⁸

The last group is where progressive masculinities are located. These may well draw on innovative strategies but are focused on realizing the well-being of black men and others. The other types of masculinities that Franklin described have all been seduced into understanding and practicing masculinity in some form as a system of domination over others.

Intersectional Theory: Privileged by Gender, Oppressed by Race?

A second theory that contributes to the study of black masculinities in the context of hegemonic masculinities is intersectional theory. Intersectional theory was developed by black feminists for the purpose of examining black women's lives. The theory was first articulated by Kim Crenshaw, a black feminist working within the law from the perspective of critical race theory.⁶⁹ Intersectional theory challenges a single-axis framework for understanding black women's oppression. The single-axis framework suggested that black women were either oppressed by race or were oppressed because of gender and did not account for black women's oppression structured by both sexism and racism. Crenshaw used the traffic intersection to describe structural intersections of systems of domination. The intersection had cars coming from various directions: one direction for race, another for sex, and a third for some other socially structured force. She suggested that in an accident it is often too difficult to tell which axis caused the accident, and oftentimes more than one axis was at fault. Applied to black women, the theory seemed to imply that they were doubly burdened and worse off than black men, a topic undertaken by Stephanie Phillips in this volume.

When this theory was applied to black men, it was often interpreted to suggest that black men were subordinated by race but privileged by gender.⁷⁰ In other words, as black people, black men were oppressed by race, but as men, black men were privileged by gender. This understanding seemed to capture a host of practices and realities. For instance, it seemed to capture the fact that although the median income for working black men is less than that of working white men, it is, nonetheless, higher than the median income for black women. Further, it seemed to capture the fact that it is all too often black men who comprise the leadership roles in the black community, roles they often appropriate to themselves vis-à-vis women because they are men. For example, black clergy,

who feature significantly among black leadership, also often agree and promote the position that women should not become religious ministers or pastors and thereby limit women's opportunities to leadership positions via this avenue.

However, this understanding failed to address practices such as racial profiling that seemed to happen to black men because they were both black and men. In other words, black men under these circumstance did not seem to be privileged by gender and oppressed by race but rather oppressed by both race and gender. The idea that black men were privileged by gender and subordinated by race undermined the potential of intersectional theory to further delineate differences among men. Black men are not just some undifferentiated group; they are not just raced and gendered but also are distinguished by class, age, and region. Potentially the intersections were many and varied.

But intersectionality theory can be interpreted in other ways that render it a more nuanced theory. First, it might suggest that black men are dominant and unjustly privileged in the private realm of the black community, which constitutes a family of sorts; but that black men are subordinated publicly, meaning their masculinity is subordinated within the larger society outside of the black community. Here black communities are seen as inhabiting private space within the public-private dichotomy of male and female spheres of influence. This is a sexist, and racist framework, in part, because it relegates black men to a space *made* marginal and to which women are supposed to be limited while in many ways supporting men's control over this space often at women's expense. Nevertheless, it may better capture the dynamics within the black community that often yield black men in leadership positions. It may also capture the dynamic within black communities of privileging black men's victimization over black women's victimization as in the Thomas-Hill context,⁷¹ or even where black women are victimized by black men as through rape as Thema Bryant makes clear in Chapter 14. But it fails to account for the way in which, as John Calmore explains in Chapter 8, young black men may be over-policed and constructed as unwanted traffic even within their own communities.

Another way to interpret the intersectional theory as applied to black men is to understand it as pointing out that many social structures contribute to the construction of individual and group identity and that to determine what a particular intersectional identity means requires scholars to look to the context. In other words, when applying intersectional theory to the black male experience, one must look to the context of a particular situation to determine whether black men are being privileged or oppressed by gender or any other structure that intersects with it.⁷²

Multidimensionality Theory: Privileged by Gender and Oppressed by Gendered Racism

A third theory that contributes to understanding the ways black masculinities are positioned in relation to hegemonic masculinity is multidimensionality

theory, an emerging theory that grew out of intersectionality. Many black feminists and critical race theorists have contributed to its development. However, a number of gay/queer theorists producing scholarship in the areas of critical race theory⁷³ and LatCrit⁷⁴ have made substantial contributions to its development.⁷⁵ Multidimensionality theory directs focus to the various and multiple social structures that oppress and constrain the agency of individuals and groups in uniquely distinctive ways.

Multidimensionality has three insights. First, it recognizes that an individual has many dimensions, some that are embodied by human traits, such as skin color, sex, earlobe length, and eye color, and others that are expressive, such as being Methodist or Catholic or a cat owner or dog owner. In addition, each individual possesses a unique set of traits and ways of being. As such, communities encompass a diversity of unique and uniquely positioned individuals. Recognizing this uniqueness suggests that no group or community effort can represent every single person in his or her individuality.

Second, however, some of these dimensions are "materially relevant" in that society structures systems of privilege and disadvantage on the basis of them.⁷⁶ That is, society over time develops meanings and systems around either particular traits such as color or, say, religious differences that justify and influence the allocation of both status and material resources, privileging some group traits or dimensions over others. So for instance, although the color of a person's skin has been developed as materially relevant, being a dog owner has not. And though earlobe length might in another society bring with it certain meanings and privileges, it is not materially relevant in the United States. Here the focus is on systems of domination, including class, race, and sexuality.

Third, the various systems of disadvantage and privilege or systems of domination interact with one another and are mutually reinforcing. So for instance, elite white heterosexual men occupy each of the privileged sides of the race, sex-gender, and class systems within the United States and as such constitute the most privileged and advantaged people within the system who represent the idealized norm.

Multidimensionality provokes several related ideas. It suggests that as all groups are made of unique individuals who predictably are positioned differently with regard to the various systems of domination, all groups are coalitions of different people and different groups of people.⁷⁷ Further, the intersection of two or more systems of disadvantage may produce unique categories and experiences. For example, although intersectional theory might suggest that black men are privileged by gender and oppressed by race, multidimensionality might capture the experience and phenomenon of racial profiling by suggesting that black men are sometimes oppressed because they are blackmen—one socially and multidimensionally constructed positionality. Thus, to the extent the various systems of disadvantage are mutually reinforcing, the elimination of only

one system, such as race, while weakening the overall structure of domination, is unlikely to change the oppressed conditions of black people.

Multidimensionality also provides insight into certain social tendencies. One tendency is for cultural stereotypes to be multifaceted. In other words, cultural stereotypes, in which specific groups are targeted, may employ more than a single system of oppression to stigmatize the disadvantaged group.⁷⁸ So for instance, the historical stereotype of black men as violent, sexually aggressive, and lazy employs not only racialized images—even though race is not mentioned; rather, black men are being referenced—but also images that are classed, sexualized, and gendered.⁷⁹

Another tendency is that within multidimensional groups, like black communities, the most privileged people within the group often cling to the socially privileged aspects of their identities. So for instance, it is not surprising that while calling on sisterhood, white women feminists often used their whiteness to assert their domination over black women and the growing feminist field, or that those black men who understand themselves as oppressed by race often assert their masculinity as justification for their representational race status in which they assert dominion for speaking for black people.⁸⁰ In doing so the actors are complicit with and conform to the understandings of domination implicit in the privileged sites within these systems. They often assert them to bond with other similarly privileged people or to exert dominion over or to exclude more disadvantaged people within the community.

This is problematic because it reinforces the very system against which these groups are fighting by undermining solidarity, as in solidarity among women. In addition, it strengthens their secondary statuses within the privileged system. So for instance, black men's appeals to the masculine ideal strengthen ideal hegemonic masculinity. But ideal masculinity is raced white and understands black masculinity as secondary. The assertion therefore reconfirms black men's secondary status and reinforces black subordination.⁸¹ And finally, these moves increase the possible success of opponents that seek to divide groups along these cleavages of difference in a divide-and-rule ploy.

Because of these tendencies, groups that engage in political projects must do so not simply on the basis of shared disadvantage or victimhood; they must come together on the basis of shared commitments and accountability to one another.⁸² In this way multidimensionality also highlights the potential for coalition building.

Relating the Project of Progressive Blackness to Progressive Masculinities

What is the relationship between blackness as a political project to hegemonic masculinity, and ultimately to progressive masculinities? I suggest here that the political project of blackness has always been primarily concerned with the elimination of domination. The ideas in black communities about what domination

entails—simply race, gender, class, or something else—and which strategies should be employed to counter domination have differed over time and among different individuals and groups of black people. However, underneath these different visions is a striving for black people's well-being, which has been variously interpreted to encompass black self-determination and self-appreciation as well as the recognition of black agency, viewpoint, and humanity.

It now turns to several political or intellectual black movements to illustrate the program of antidomination and black edification. I survey black nationalism, Afrocentricity, black feminist thought, and briefly black gay and lesbian thought, as well as transformationist ideas for three reasons. First, having focused on the disagreements between Afrocentrists and black feminists in the introduction, I want to demonstrate that both their scholarship as well as the scholarship of black gay and lesbian and transformationists share some basic concerns and approaches to the well-being of black people. Second, I seek to make apparent the justification for black people's commitment to the eradication of domination, as well as its depth and breadth. I do so to suggest that this commitment is incompatible with a simultaneous commitment to the domination inherent in ideal masculinity in part because it recognizes the harm domination does to human potential. Stated differently, the legitimacy of a claim to self-determination is wholly undermined by a commitment to limiting the self-determination and agency of others. Third, this exploration brings together the two sides of the definition proffered: Progressive black masculinities are both about a stance against domination and a commitment to the valuation and empowerment of black humanity.

I begin with a brief analysis of black nationalism because I believe it articulates the elements that are crucial to the material and spiritual welfare of black communities. These elements both best capture the harms caused to black people by white supremacy as exercised through racism and remain in many ways the articulated basis of the project of blackness.

Black Nationalism

Black nationalism is a political, economic, and cultural project that emphasizes black self-determination, self-definition, and self-love.⁸³ Captured in part in the theories of people such as Martin Delaney, Alexander Crummell, Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Du Bois, Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, and Malcolm X,⁸⁴ its primary goals are to pursue black people's control over their own destinies, self-determination, and to affirm black humanity.⁸⁵ The goal of pursuing black people's control over their own destinies was primarily a political-economic project, illustrated most dramatically in Garvey's organizational efforts, including his Back to Africa movement and the economic self-sufficiency and self-help ideology and practices of Elijah Mohammed through the Nation of Islam. This project is also captured, for example, in the critiques by Malcolm X and others of the integrationist approach to black education in the 1960s.⁸⁶ They rejected what

they saw as the implication within the integrationist movement that black schools were inherently inferior. They argued that the problem of black education was a problem of resources and control—that is, black control over the school, teacher staffing, and curricular content.⁸⁷ Malcolm X explained, “A school system in an all-white neighborhood is not [considered] a segregated school system. The only time it’s segregated is when it is in a community other than white, but at the same time controlled by whites. So my understanding of a segregated school system ... is a school that’s controlled by people other than those who go there. ... [However] if we can get an all-black school, one that we can control, staff it ourselves with the type of teacher who has our good at heart, with the type of book that has many of the missing ingredients that have produced this inferiority complex in our people, then we don’t feel that an all-black school is necessarily a segregated school.”⁸⁸

The project of affirming black humanity is meant in part to counter the potential inferiority complex engendered by racism but also to reflect the agency of the black personality manifest both before and after the colonial encounter. The project of affirming black humanity, though political in many respects, is primarily a cultural endeavor. It stresses black self-love, which by definition rejects white supremacist ideology that denigrates black people as inferior and without a history or agency. It focuses on the way African Americans have survived and have claimed human dignity despite the dehumanizing processes of American slavery, segregation, and institutionalized racism. This survival turned on African Americans’ cultural responses to these oppressive conditions. These responses are seen as distinctive, encompassing a mixture of various cultural strands (i.e., African, Amerindian, and European),⁸⁹ but are most notably tied to and influenced by Africans and the cultural practices the African slaves first brought with them. These are captured in various black art forms, including music and aesthetic presentations, ways of communicating, family structure, certain values, and philosophical orientations, which represent the more mobile forms of African cultural expression.⁹⁰ Black nationalism remains a strain of thought prevalent in black communities and is shared by most black intellectuals who work on issues of concern to or who claim to write from the perspectives of black communities.⁹¹ In fact, integrationists of the Sixties would probably agree with many of these ideas.

However, black nationalism goes further: It sees African Americans as a nation, viewed by some as an internally colonized nation and others as an ethnic group.⁹² It suggests that black communities should not have to give up their culture, admittedly constructed in the furnace of white supremacy and linked to a distinctive African cultural fingerprint.⁹³ This they argue, drawing on Du Bois,⁹⁴ would amount to what Gary Peller has called a “painless genocide,”⁹⁵ in which black communities and people would be assimilated, absorbed, and dissolved into whiteness and the white culture’s limited vision of America. Further, they argue that African Americans should be linked to Africa and diasporan Africans through the politics of Pan-Africanism.

These themes remain a part of black thinking and conceptualization. For instance, the idea of self-determination remains in some quarters as a political, economic project with separatist orientations,⁹⁶ whereas in others it has come to more closely relate to the idea of agency, or the ability to act or to act in concert with others.⁹⁷ In this sense, it is both an individual and community asset, recognizing not only that individuals act and know themselves through communities but also that the individual’s well-being is linked to the well-being of communities. Stated differently, to the extent that a society subordinates a particular group, even its most liberated members will suffer the ill effects of their group’s subordination. In any case, systems of subordination limit and constrain self-determination and agency. These ideas of self-determination and black self-appreciation remain a part of black philosophy and a basis for the project of blackness, as is evidenced by Afrocentric, black feminist, gay and lesbian, and transformationist thought.

Afrocentricity

Afrocentricity, though a contested term, embodies many of the broad themes found in black nationalism. As an intellectual tradition first fully articulated by Molefi Asante, Afrocentricity is situated in many black studies programs in American universities. Afrocentricity took up the *cultural* project seemingly apparent in black nationalism and inherent in its goals of promoting black self-respect. It does so by seeking to delineate and to articulate black perspectives and a black worldview on the full range of issues involving African and African Diaspora peoples.⁹⁸ In doing so, Afrocentricity seeks to develop the scholarship and knowledge base about African and diasporan African cultures and the links among them.

Its central goal, however, is to center blackness and reclaim black agency.⁹⁹ The idea here is that black people are subject to cultural domination. They argue that blacks have been seen and see themselves through Eurocentric lenses—that is, through a lens centered on a European worldview, complete with white supremacy, which declares whites as the primary agents and actors in history and in all areas of life and which relegates black people to the role of spectators and objects of history and current life. To the extent that black people often see themselves through Eurocentric eyes, they are “misoriented because [they are] culturally disoriented,”¹⁰⁰ as Eurocentricity generally assigns and is institutionally organized to convey the message that all that is black is evil, pathological, and degenerate and makes no contribution to the rest of humanity. This disorientation, together with white internalized and institutionalized racism, stifles the realization of the black nationalist goals of black self-love, self-definition, and self-determination in the political and economic arenas. Afrocentricity seeks to use the knowledge gathered about a unique “African cultural system”¹⁰¹ or an African cultural fingerprint that African Americans share, to analyze and critique black behavior from

a black perspective, thereby centering and revealing black agency. They also seek to reorient this agency in a congruent and productive way by stressing values such as community, harmony, spirituality, responsibility to family and community, and emotional and intuitive—in addition to rational—ways of knowing. These, they argue, are central to an African cultural system.¹⁰²

As such, Afrocentricity involves an ideological project of fighting white cultural domination by grounding black cultural appreciation within both the minds of people and the sociopolitical order, through, for example, entrenching multiculturalism.

However, Afrocentricity has been criticized for romanticizing African and African American history and for being reactive in a number of their ideas.¹⁰³ Further, they have also been criticized for promoting a sweepstakes of black authenticity (i.e., who is authentically black) that essentializes black identity, does not recognize the multiplicity of black identity, and fails to question the ethics of a particular position, authentic or not.¹⁰⁴ Latent in both of these critiques seems a concern that Afrocentricity objectifies black culture and understands or promotes it as static and unchanging as opposed to dynamic and adapting. Whatever African American culture is, it is different from what it was in the past and will and should be different in the future. This does not mean that it should not exist or that it might not in some ways carry forward a cultural fingerprint. It simply means that it will change and will adapt itself within the social environment of its times.

Afrocentricity has also been criticized for being sexist and homophobic.¹⁰⁵ Although the theory's stance on these issues seem to be in a state of flux, there remains a certain maleness to Afrocentric writings that smack of patriarchy,¹⁰⁶ which is in part reflected in some of their most notable programs. These deal primarily with black males and include their work to establish all-black male schools for black boys and their initiation of rites-of-passage programs for black male youths. Yet it is in this work where Afrocentricity makes contributions to theorizing about the positioning of black men in relation to hegemonic masculinity. Though they might analyze the conditions of black men through the lens of racism and argue that their problems are the consequences of racist cultural domination rather than a combination of racist cultural domination and gender hegemony, their conclusions belie their argument.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, Afrocentricity is committed to the project of black edification through revealing black agency and directing that agency toward black edification. Further, Afrocentricity highlights the problems of cultural domination and as such can be said to stand against certain forms of domination.

To the extent that domination is a concern and that the edification of the black community is its goal, a limited concern—as opposed to a practical focus—on only the domination of black men within black communities, as critics have charged, undermines the goals of the Afrocentric project. That is, it undermines community empowerment because it is only concerned

with part of the community. But it also undermines others' participation in their movement because of its own apparent disregard for the harm of others. Stated differently, why should black women, for instance, share or care about Afrocentric concerns, particularly where their proposed program requires women's subordination? And finally, it belies the question of whether black male empowerment can be accomplished without taking into account the ways black men are differently positioned by class, sexuality, or other structures of domination, which may also harm black men.

Black Feminist Thought

Black feminists have also engaged in a project of promoting black self-appreciation and self-determination through revealing black women's agency and humanity. That is, they agree that black people have agency and as such are "subjects and conscious actors in the creation of history and culture rather than the passive recipients of someone else's actions."¹⁰⁸ This idea is reflected in Toni Morrison's comments on the place of Afro-American literature:¹⁰⁹ "[I]t is no longer acceptable merely to imagine us and imagine for us. We have always been imagining ourselves. We are not Isak Dinesen's 'aspects of nature,' nor ... Conrad's 'unspeaking.' We are the subject of our own narrative, witnesses to and participants in our own experience, and, in no way coincidentally, in the experience of those with whom we have come in contact. We are not, in fact, 'other.' We are choices."¹¹⁰

Black people have not only actively imagined themselves; they have also been actively involved in creating themselves and their culture despite tremendous social constraints.¹¹¹ Black feminism, a diverse and complex body of scholarship, focuses on the experiences, writings, activities, and insights of both scholarly and ordinary black women's lives as a way of demonstrating their agency and humanity. Further, they have argued that black women's ideas and activities contribute to critical social theory, including the feminist theory on which they draw and in which they participate.¹¹² So for instance, Patricia Hill Collins suggested that Sojourner Truth's question of "Ain't I a Woman?" exposed the culturally constructedness of womanhood.¹¹³ Further, she argued that the limitations of black women to domestic and agricultural work for much of American history has provided them unique insights into positions of subordination—both their own and others.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, black feminists have consistently and emphatically insisted that the lives of black women are oppressed not just by race but also by sex, class, and more recently by sexuality, drawing on work of people such as Sojourner Truth, Martha W. Stewart, Francis E. W. Harper, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, and Zora Neale Hurston. They have suggested that the structures of domination impacting their lives are interlinked, connected, and mutually reinforcing.

Black feminists have concentrated on race and sex, in particular, as intersecting social structures of oppression that have limited and constrained black women's lives and agency. They have argued that black women's lives have been affected not just by race but also significantly by sexism and the gendered structure of oppression. They contend that black women's experiences, activities, and insights have been suppressed and oppressed due to the functioning of racism among white men and women—including white feminist women—and sexism by white and black men—including black nationalists. They challenge the articulation of the goals of black struggle as the establishment of a patriarchal order. This, according to them, is inconsistent with its stated concern for the community, as these communities include black women and patriarchy limits black women's agency in some of the same ways that race is thought to limit black men's agency. They also have begun to challenge the idea that black men's life-chances are simply affected by race. Rather, as Collins argues in this volume, stereotypes about black men have always been not only raced as inferior but also sexualized and gendered as deviant. In other words, black men are depicted as sexually out of control, as violent brutes, drawing on both images of race and gender.

Further, in her critique of a definition of feminism as being primarily about women's social equality, hooks noted that all men are not equal¹¹⁵ and thus defines feminism as something more than social equality with men. Rather, she explains that "feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression. Therefore, it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels as well as a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires."¹¹⁶ Feminism defined in this way addresses the social structures of oppression that, according to hooks, direct attention to the differing ways women are subordinated, including those who are also subject to racial and class-based domination. It also suggests that although the focus is on transforming sexism as a system that primarily disadvantages women, to be effective, it must also address the ways women are differently positioned by way of class, race, and sexuality. In so directing attention, it begins to capture other structures of domination and their effects on other people including men.

Under this formulation and to the extent that black feminists agree with it, they are committed to active engagement in dismantling domination and the promotion of human flourishing for people in general, for black people and women in particular, and for black women specifically. From this perspective, the project of progressive blackness entails the edification of black people and the elimination of all forms of domination that limit this edification for all those raced as black. But in addition, it must address and must build coalitions with people committed to the elimination of all forms of subordination, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism.

Although black feminist women dominate this field, black male feminist and profeminist black men have joined their efforts in standing against sexism and gendered oppression as part of and in addition to antiracist struggle. These include men such as Michael Awkward, Luke Harris, Devon Carbado, and Mark Anthony Neal. They grapple with exactly what the terms *black male feminist* or *profeminist black men* mean, but they understand sexism to be a system of domination that privileges men. Further, they recognize the ills of domination in its various forms and the need to edify subordinated identity, including blackness, others who are racially oppressed, such as Native Americans, women, sexual minorities, and poor and working-class people. Though still developing, their goals seem to be on the one hand to develop the "women" within themselves and to support their mothers, sister, and daughters. But on the other hand they seek to articulate and make visible—from the standpoint of men—their privileges as men.¹¹⁷ That is, their project is to fill out the picture of the other side of the relation of power, their own privilege. So for instance, they seek to acknowledge and to explain the ways black men head most of the black institutional spaces at the expense of and often to the exclusion of black women.

Black Gay and Lesbian Thought

Black gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, (GLBTT) and other sexual minorities have also keenly felt the need to articulate, to expose, and to promote the human agency and self-determination of black people. James Baldwin has been a leading figure in discourses about black agency. From him, as Kendall Thomas suggests, black gay men not only learned to live in this world as black men but as gay men. But the community efforts of GLBTT people often have been undermined and dismissed. For instance, Bayard Rustin's participation in the civil rights movement was restricted in part because he was gay.

Audre Lorde spoke to these issues within black communities in her essay "I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing across Sexualities." She discussed dealing with differences between black people and urged black women to "recognize that unity does not require that we be identical to each other. Black women are not one great vat of homogenized chocolate milk. We have many different faces, and we do not have to become each other in order to work together."¹¹⁸ ... When I say I am a Black feminist, I mean I recognize that my power as well as my primary oppressions come as a result of my Blackness as well as my womanness, and therefore my struggles on both these fronts are inseparable. When I say I am a Black Lesbian, I mean I am a woman whose primary focus of loving, physical as well as emotional, is directed to women."¹¹⁹

She then challenged people who insist that "Black Lesbians are not political ... and are not involved in the struggles of Black people,"¹²⁰ highlighting many of her own efforts in the struggle while all the time a black lesbian. She then went on to list other black gay and lesbian people who were also voices in the black struggle, including Langston Hughes, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Angelina Weld

Grimke, Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, and Lorraine Hansberry.¹²¹ She commented that the “terror of Black Lesbians is buried in that deep inner place where we have been taught to fear all difference—to kill it or ignore it.”¹²² Lorde then restated and reminded her sisters that “I am a Black Lesbian, and I *am* your sister.”¹²³

Lorde defined *heterosexism* as “a belief in the inherent superiority of one form of loving over all others and thereby the right to dominance” and *homophobia* as “a terror surrounding feelings of love for a member of the same sex and thereby a hatred of those feeling in others.”¹²⁴ She is one of many who have advocated and analyzed the patriarchal sex-gender system that not only privileges men but also promotes domination on basis of heterosexuality.

Though GLBTT people differ on the best way to analyze the role of sexuality in life, GLBTT scholarship, drawing on feminist scholarship, has largely been about unpacking the sex-gender system and the sexuality hierarchy, for the two are related. First, the sex-gender system assigns not just social roles to biological males and females but also sexual roles. These sexual roles mandate that men be only sexually attracted to and be intimate with women and vice versa. Women occupy the inferior and subordinate positions in this complementary system. Married relations between men and women are held to be the basis of the family unit, with the nuclear family understood and promoted as the idealized family. In this sense, not only is same-sex desire and intimacy devalued but to the extent heterosexuality is rejected as the basis for a family, such rejection is seen as undermining the family unit, potentially corrupting children, and opening up a sexual can of worms that have little to do with consensual adult sexual love and expression.

Although the oppression GLBTT people face is fundamentally linked to maintaining the current sex-gender system, human sexuality and desire have also been subjugated by fear and taboo as well as by systems of oppression. The breadth and diversity of human sexuality and desire constitutes a separate field of inquiry, as do the systems of heterosexism and homophobia, which are meant to constrain it. These help to keep the sex-gender system afloat and to suppress human sexual diversity. The expansion of studies to explore this diversity continues to expand, and GLBTT and queer people are at the heart of this exploration and expansion.

Transformationist

Manning Marable described yet another “ideological tendency within Black public discourse and inside the struggles to define the African American community.”¹²⁵ He referred to this tradition as “transformationist,” or the radical perspective, and characterized it as “the collective efforts of black people neither to integrate nor self-segregate but to transform the existing power relationships and the racist institutions of the state, the economy and society. . . .

[This] necessitates the building of a powerful protest movement, based largely among the most oppressed classes and social groups, to demand the fundamental restructuring of the basic institutions and patterns of ownership within society. Toward this larger goal, the building of black institutions is an essential process, in providing the resources for African American people to survive and resist.”¹²⁶ Again, this group is committed to black self-determination, black agency, and black humanity. But they are committed to a larger goal, namely, restructuring the system so that all people will be in a position to live well, to define themselves outside social stereotypes, to appreciate themselves, and to act ethically in accountable ways toward themselves and others.

This, too, is the antisubordination project. But this group would emphasize that a project refusing to address the economic relations of domination and exploitation that both underpin and shape the racial and sex-based systems of oppression cannot transform the latter. For instance, when Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, many people questioned whether the inadequate evacuation plans and the slow rescue of those who remained there during the hurricane were the result of racism. However, when the question is seen from the perspective of the people themselves, it seems obvious that those who remained in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina did not do so because they were black but because they lacked the resources to leave the city. This was compounded by political and economic choices that assumed adequate wealth while ignoring growing poverty levels in the United States and thus assumed an order to evacuate the city was sufficient to save lives. For a different example, the declining availability of work that pays life-sustaining wages affects not only blacks but also increasingly broad groups of Americans as well as millions in underdeveloped countries. In the United States, those unable to find jobs, including young black men, are vulnerable to being pressed into service as cannon fodder in imperialist wars, often against other people of color. These wars are meant to reinforce and to sustain the white supremacist capitalist system that such people otherwise might be inclined to resist.

The struggle must be fought on all fronts with human liberation and the material well-being of all as the goal. Confronting and transforming an economic system that prizes self-interest, consumption, and commodification of everything for the benefit of a few to one that places people and their human development at its center will be an essential component of this struggle.

Summary

Even though these subgroups within the black community have had different focuses, each has been committed in some ways to the political project of blackness in the context of white supremacist America and American practice. The project of progressive blackness encompasses all of these groups and their various struggles to the extent they are committed to the elimination and transformation of domination in all its forms. As such, it is a project about

the existential wholeness of black communities, the material and spiritual well-being of those communities and its peoples in all their diversities, and the linking of black people with others similarly committed.

Ethical and Active Participation

Black feminists have sometimes been accused of raising issues that distract from the struggle. Some feminists have accused them of distracting and undermining the feminist struggle by inserting issues of race. Some black scholars have similarly argued that black women raising the issue of sexism are distracting and diverting resources from the struggle against racism. These concerns will inevitably be raised as objections against a project that advocates for the active and ethical engagement in multiple struggles to transform the structure of domination and subordination on which the current American order is based. Implicit in these concerns is a concern about time and energy, focus and conflicts.

Each of us is a finite being with only so much time and energy to commit, in addition to daily living, to the active involvement of multiple struggles. Focused energy is probably better than scattered energy.¹²⁷ Thus, as a practical matter most people will be actively and heavily committed to one struggle. This is fine. In addition, it is hoped that each person brings his or her own unique innovative practices, performances, and gifts to those endeavors in which he or she finds passion. However, there is a difference between concentrating energy in one direction, as a practical matter, and assuming that this one effort is the whole. Most of our efforts will be within one aspect of a much bigger picture. Keeping the bigger picture in mind and the way struggles are linked perhaps hinders us from taking positions that subordinate and minimize efforts that are companions to our own, as well as taking positions that might reinforce the structures of domination against which we are fighting. In addition, keeping the bigger picture in mind might also aid us in spying and in taking advantage of coalitional possibilities, which presumably will increase our chances of success.

Further, though actively engaging in the antisubordination struggle may mean that much of our energies are engaged in a single aspect of the struggle, in our everyday lives we are undoubtedly presented with multiple micro-activities to strengthen multiple movements. These activities may involve reorienting our family lives. It may mean refusing to be silent when people with whom we are in the company make disparaging remarks about black men, women, gay men, transgender people, or the disabled. These moments become opportunities to strengthen antisubordination sensibilities.

At the same time, celebrating, playing, signifying, and calling out our difference may well be the fun of life. Here homogeneity is not the goal. Rather, the goal is to be in the process of changing and creating a society where we can appreciate our differences and can see in it our strengths.

And finally, our involvement in of struggles may well bring us into conflicts with other progressive people about priorities and goals. These are inevitable. Joan Williams suggested a code of ethics that may help to guide our efforts and our conflicts. She proposed four rules, parts of which I quote.

“Allow for differing priorities.”¹²⁸ We cannot continuously address all facets of an issue. “Progressive people have different priorities. We need to respect that.”

“Recognize there will be zero sum moments.”¹²⁹ There will be moments when we will disagree and when our projects will be diametrically opposed. For example, as between a queer activist who believes pornography provides a link for gay teens in contrast to a MacKinnon-like feminist who believes all pornography is linked with the exploitation of women. Try to control the bitterness of the disagreement and leave windows open for other coalitional efforts.

“Do no harm Zero sum moments are the exception . . . where progressive agendas diverge,”¹³⁰ simply do no harm. For example, in trying to aid women, feminists should not demonize black women; in trying to aid men, black men should not demonize gay men.

“Be as inclusive as possible.”¹³¹ The more the merrier.

Conclusion

I have argued that progressive black masculinities are unique and innovative performances of the masculine self that, on the one hand, personally eschew and actively, ethically stand against social structures of domination and, on the other, that value, validate, and empower black humanity—in all its variety—as part of the diverse and multicultural humanity of others in the global family. As such, progressive black masculinities embrace a fully liberatory agenda. Progressive black masculinities sit at the intersection of a progressive black political project and a progressive masculinities political project. The first insist on the existential wholeness of black communities and black people and their connections to others in the human family and the transformation of systems of domination that confine and limit them. The latter are committed to transforming the systems of domination of men over women, sexual minorities, and other men specifically, as well as other systems that differently limit others.

Further, I suggest that although black men are oppressed by race, they are sometimes privileged by gender and other times are the specific targets of gender racism. That is, even though patriarchal gender oppression as a system is geared toward the subordination of women, men and black men in particular are harmed by the patriarchal order in two ways. One, hegemonic masculinity and the sex-gender system commit them to dominating over others and to constraining their human expression to limited, often socially problematic traits. Further, black men as subordinate masculinities are

subject to stereotypes and are the target of efforts that understand them not simply as black but as the gendered multidimensional category blackmen — for starters. And finally, I suggest that to the extent black men engage in hegemonic masculine practice, they may well be reinforcing the system of racist oppression that they often seek to eliminate.

Notes

1. By performances I mean ways of being, ways of living. Here I am drawing on Butler's and Kimmel's work. See, e.g., Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 13–32; and Michael S. Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) on "doing gender" and noting that in our interactions with others we rely mostly on secondary sex characteristics that we can see and the ways in which they are dressed up. Thus, he discusses gender as a performance, 100–106.
2. A diagram of this order might look like this:
(assignment)race → → (system)racism → → (order)white supremacy
3. "Mission Statement of Black Men for the Eradication of Sexism, Morehouse College 1994," in *Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).
4. Sumi Cho was one of the first people that I heard use this sort of term in discussing racialized sexual harassment. Sumi K. Cho, "Converging Stereotypes in Racialized Sexual Harassment: Where the Model Minority Meets Suzie Wong," in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 2d ed., ed. R. Delgado and J. Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 532–542.
5. Masculinity is part of the patriarchal order. The patriarchal order is supported through the conscious, unconscious, and institutional habits of people and institutions. Where people fit in this order is determined by biological sex and the cultural assignment of traits associated with that biology. Further, the sex–gender system, because it believes in the hierarchical and complementary roles of the sexes, also compels a heterosexual order which is supported through homophobia and heterosexism among other things. This system can be diagramed in a way that is similar to the diagram of racism in a white supremacist order. However, though the systems are similar in their operation there are significant differences. Diagramed, the system of patriarchal gender oppression and sexism might look like, this:
(assignment) sex/gender → (system) sexism/gender oppression → (order) patriarchy or male supremacy
sexuality (biological/social assignment)
↓
(system)homophobia and heterosexism
↓
compulsory heterosexuality order

Manning Marable, ed., *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
Ibid.

Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 25. See also Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin and Hyman, 1990), 28, which makes a similar point. She discusses the interdependence of thought and action and notes that standpoints of the oppressed "can stimulate resistance."

See, generally, Ronald T. Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1993) which discusses some of the "founding fathers" of the U.S. and notes that some of them believed that America should be a white country. He then discusses and interprets a variety of efforts as constituting parts of the project of constructing a white country.

10. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Race, Reform and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Anti-discrimination Law," *Harvard Law Review* 101, no. 7 (1988), 1331–87; Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Athena Mutua, "The Rise of Critical Race Theory in Law," in *Handbook Series of Race and Ethnic Studies*, ed. Collins and John Solomos (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006).
11. Michael Eric Dyson, *Is Bill Cosby Right? Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind?* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2005), 40.
12. West, *Race Matters*, 29.
13. Ibid., 30.
14. Dyson argues that throughout his career, Bill Cosby took a colorblind approach to race, presenting his race as incidental to his humanity. He adamantly adhered to this approach, refusing to be drawn into the civil rights movement or to speak or act as a leader of blacks, but he also refused to engage his professional comedy to unpack or expose stereotypical thinking. Dyson also suggests that Cosby's comments further stigmatize the poor and can be used by conservatives to justify further shrinking aid to the poor in part because his comments are blind to the institutional structures and policies that foster poverty in general and black poverty specifically. Further, he notes that practices such as poor blacks choosing unique names for their children or stylizing their bodies are in part cultural responses to racism. When seen in a historical context they contain resistance to the racist and oppressive social structures that limit black potentiality. Whether Dyson is wholly correct in his analysis of Cosby's career is arguable. As Dyson notes, Cosby's Ph.D. dissertation adequately deals with the educational problems of race. Further, Cosby has been a big supporter of historically black colleges and educational efforts. Thus, the claim that he has not used his status to promote black well-being is debatable. Dyson, *Bill Cosby*.
15. Dyson, *Bill Cosby*, 15–57.
16. Ibid.
17. A. Mutua, "Rise of Critical Race Theory," citing Stephanie Phillips.
18. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*.
19. Ibid.
20. bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1995), 78.
21. Francisco Valdes, "Identity Maneuvers in Law and Society," *University of Missouri Kansas City Law Review* 71, no. 2 (2002), 387, which notes that the U.S. structure combines a particular strain of "patriarchy, heterosexism, and capitalism."
22. Ibid.; see also Dyson, *Bill Cosby*.
23. A. Mutua, "Rise of Critical Race Theory"; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*; Dyson, *Bill Cosby*. However, West suggested that blackness would not have any meaning except in the context of a race-conscious society. West, *Race Matters*, 25. Thus, in the absence of such a society, race consciousness would be unnecessary. Afrocentric thinkers might reply that it does not mean that some sort of African or ethnic consciousness would cease to exist.
24. See, generally, Michael S. Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.
25. Kimmel, *Gendered Society*.
26. Ibid.
27. Crenshaw, "Race, Reform."
28. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University Press, 1981).
29. Allan G. Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 61.
30. Ibid., 61.
31. Ibid., 61–62.
32. Karen Engle, "After the Collapse of the Public/Private Distinction: Strategizing Women's Rights," in *Women and the Market: Collapsing Distinctions in International Law* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1994).
33. See, generally, Darren Hutchinson, "Ignoring the Sexualization of Race: Heteronormativity, Critical Race Theory, and Anti-racist Politics," *Buffalo Law Review* 47 (1999), 1–116; Hutchinson, "Identity Crisis: 'Intersectionality,' 'Multidimensionality,' and the Development of an Adequate Theory of Subordination," *Michigan Journal of Race and Law* 6, no. 3 (2001), 285–317; Hutchinson, "Unexplainable on Grounds Other than Race":

- The Inversion of Privilege and Subordination in Equal Protection Jurisprudence," *University of Illinois Law Review* 2003 (2003), 615–700; Hutchinson, "Critical Race Histories: In and Out," *American University Law Review* 53, no. 6 (2004), 1184–1215; Francisco Valdes, "Queers, Sissies, Dykes and Tomboys: Deconstructing the Conflation of 'Sex,' 'Gender,' and 'Sexual Orientation' in Euro-American Law and Society," *California Law Review* 83 (1995), 1–377; Laurie Rose Kepros, "Queer Theory: Weed or Seed in the Garden of Legal Theory," *Law and Sex* 9 (1999–2000), 279–310; Max H. Kirsch, *Queer Theory and Social Change* (2000); Eric Savoy, "That Ain't All She Ain't: Doris Day and Queer Performativity," *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*, ed. Ellis Hanson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 151–82; John D'Emilio, "A New Beginning: The Birth of Gay Liberation," in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, ed. D'Emilio (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 223–39; "Queers Read This" (distributed at New York City Gay Pride Parade, 1990), reprinted in William B. Rubenstein, ed., *Cases and Materials on Sexual Orientation and the Law*, 2d ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1997); Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 13–32; and Sandi Farrell, "Reconsidering the Gender–Equality Perspective for Understanding LGBT Rights," *Law and Sexuality* 13 (2004), 605–703.
34. Stephanie Riger, "Rethinking the Distinction between Sex and Gender," in *Power, Privilege and the Law: A Civil Rights Reader*, ed. Leslie Bender and Daan Braverman (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1995), 232–39.
 35. See Takaki, *Different Mirror*, 139–65, 277–310, which explores how the Irish and the Jews, respectively, became white.
 36. For example, the Constitution initially allowed only those with a certain amount of property to vote.
 37. Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993), 1707–91.
 38. Clyde W. Franklin II, "Ain't I a Man? The Efficacy of Black Masculinities for Men's Studies in the 1990s," in *The American Black Male*, ed. Richard Majors and Jacob U. Gordon (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1994), 271–283.
 39. Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity," in *Theorizing Masculinities*, ed. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 121–24.
 40. Ibid.
 41. Ian Harris, *Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities* (Bristol, PA: Taylor & Francis, 1995), 10.
 42. Ibid.
 43. Ibid.
 44. Ibid.
 45. Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1967), 7–8.
 46. Kimmel, "Masculinity," 137, citing Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1970), 44.
 47. Kaufman, "Men, Feminism, and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power," in Brod and Kaufman, *Theorizing Masculinities*, 159.
 48. See Harris, *Messages Men Hear*, 18, standing for the proposition that patriarchy is a social system that benefits men. Harris quotes Rich's book *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (Bantam Double Dell, 1976) to note, "Patriarchy is the power of fathers: a familial–social, ideological, political system in which men—by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labor—determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed by the male. It does not necessarily imply that no woman has power, or that all women in a given culture may not have certain powers."
 49. Kaufman, "Men, Feminism," 145, citing C. B. McPherson.
 50. Ibid.
 51. Ibid., 146.
 52. Here I am drawing on Pharr's ideas of economic, violence, and homophobia as tools to sustain the system of patriarchy and heterosexist oppressions. See Suzanne Pharr, "Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism," in *Power, Privilege, and Law: A Civil Rights Reader*, ed. Leslie Bender and Daan Braverman (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1995), 252–63.
 53. Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression," in *Power, Privilege, and Law: A Civil Rights Reader*, ed. Leslie Bender and Daan Braverman (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1995), 66–80.
 54. "Black men remain the group with the lowest life expectancy. Those born in 1999 are expected to live to the age of 67.8, which is about 7 years less than for comparable White men (74.6). Among women born in 1999, blacks are expected to live to the age of 74.7, and whites to age 79.9." Cassandra Cantave, Dietra Lee, and Roderick Harrison, "African-Americans and Health," Joint Center Data Bank, <http://www.jointcenter.org/DB/factsheet/lifexp.htm>. See also "Premature Mortality in the United States: Public Health Issues in the Use of Years of Potential Life Lost," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 35, no. 2S (December 19, 1986): 1–11, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00001773.htm>.
 55. "Suicide among Blacks," Healthyplace.com, Depression Community, http://www.healthyplace.com/Communities/Depression/minorities_5.asp.
 56. "What about Men? Exploring Inequities in Minority Men's Health," W.K. Kellogg Foundation, June 12, 2002, http://www.wkff.org/Pubs/Health/CommunityVoices/31zt4iqkqymlsrxr2zobfgq4_20020730082714.pdf.
 57. Ibid.
 58. Harrison and Cantave, "Earnings of African Americans," Joint Center Data Bank, <http://www.jointcenter.org/DB/factsheet/earnings.htm>.
 59. Andrew Sum and others, *Trends in Black Male Joblessness and Year-Round Idleness: An Employment Crisis Ignored* (Chicago: Alternative Schools Network, June 2004).
 60. Council of Economic Advisers for the President's Initiative on Race, "Labor Markets," in *Changing America: Indicators of Social and Economic Well-Being by Race and Hispanic Origin* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO]), 23, <http://www.gpo.gov/eop/cal>.
 61. Paul Offner and Harry Holzer, "Left Behind in the Labor Market: Recent Employment Trends among Young Black Men," Center on Urban & Metropolitan Policy, Georgetown Public Policy Institute <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irpweb/publications/dps/pdfs/dp124702.pdf>.
 62. Ibid.
 63. David A. Harris, "The Stories, the Statistics, and the Law: Why 'Driving while Black' Matters," *Minnesota Law Review* 84, no. 2 (1999) 301.
 64. Clyde Franklin II, "Ain't I a Man? The Efficacy of Black Masculinities for Men's Studies in the 1990s," in Majors and Gordon, *American Black Male*, 280.
 65. Ibid.
 66. Ibid., 281.
 67. Ibid.
 68. Ibid., 280–82.
 69. A. Mutua, "Rise of Critical Race Theory."
 70. "Mission Statement," 201.
 71. Devon Carbado, "The Construction of O.J. Simpson as a Racial Victim," in *Black Men on Race, Gender, and Sexuality: A Critical Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 159–93; and Toni Morrison, *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992).
 72. I owe this insight to Stephanie Phillips. She understood the intersections to mean that such designations as race, gender, and class applied to all situations but that what the situation actually meant culturally required scholars to look to the specific context. She also suggests that there may be no meaningful difference between intersectional and multidimensional theory.
 73. Critical race theory is a theory and body of scholarship developed in law for the purpose of analyzing and exposing the connections between law and white racial power. It also seeks to change this relationship and to contribute to the liberation of oppressed people. See my introduction to this volume; see also A. Mutua, "Rise of Critical Race Theory," which cites the following resources for information about critical race theory. K. Crenshaw and others, eds., *Critical Race Theory* (New York: New Press, 1995); R. Delgado and J. Stefancic, eds., *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000); J. Perea and others, eds., *Race and Races: Cases and Resources*

- for a Diverse America (St. Paul, MN: West Group, 2000), 551–61; Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); C. Harris, "Critical Race Studies," *UCLA Law Review* 49 (2002), 1215–40; F. Valdes, J. Culp, and A. Harris, eds., *Crossroads, Directions, and a New Critical Race Theory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Delgado and Stefancic, eds., *The Latino/a Condition: A Critical Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); F. Wu, *Yellow* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); K. Aoki, "The Scholarship of Reconstruction and the Politics of Backlash," *Iowa Law Review* 81 (1998): 1467–88; T. Saito, "Alien and Non-Alien Alike: Citizenship, 'Foreignness,' and Racial Hierarchy in American Law," *Oregon Law Review* 76 (1997), 261–345; and R. Chang, "Toward an Asian American Legal Scholarship: Critical Race Theory, Post-Structuralism, and Narrative Space," *California Law Review* 81 (1993), 1241–1323.
74. LatCrit, which stands for Latina and Latino critical theory, is a body of scholarship related to critical race theory but focusing on the conditions of Latino/a communities and identities. A. Mutua, "Rise of Critical Race Theory." See also LATCRIT: Latina and Latino Critical Theory at <http://www.latcrit.org>, which lists the many publications of LatCrit symposia and colloquia.
 75. These two scholars are Darren Hutchinson, particularly in Hutchinson, "Ignoring the Sexualization"; and Valdes, "Identity Maneuvers"; and Valdes, "Beyond Sexual Orientation in Queer Legal Theory: Majoritarianism, Multidimensionality and Responsibility in Social Justice Scholarship or Legal Scholars as Cultural Warriors," *Denver University Law Review* 75, no. 4 (1998).
 76. Valdes, "Under Construction: Latcrit Consciousness, Community, and Theory," *California Law Review* 85, no. 5 (1997), 1087–1142.
 77. Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics" (University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989); and Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1991), 1299.
 78. See, generally, Nancy Ehrenreich, "Subordination and Symbiosis: Mechanisms of Mutual Support between Subordinating Systems," *University of Missouri Kansas City Law Review* 71, no. 2 (2002), 251–324.
 79. See also *ibid.*
 80. *Ibid.*
 81. *Ibid.*
 82. See hooks, *Killing Rage*.
 83. Molefi K. Asante, *Erasing Racism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003), 104, 240; West, *Race Matters*, 95–105, which discusses Malcolm X's nationalist viewpoint.
 84. Cruse, *Crises of the Negro*, 5.
 85. West, *Race Matters*, 98.
 86. Gary Peller, "Race-Consciousness," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, ed. Crenshaw and others (New York: New Press, 1997), 127–159.
 87. *Ibid.*
 88. *Ibid.*, 128.
 89. West, *Race Matters*, 101, which notes the culturally hybrid character of black music and religion that makes it distinctive.
 90. Cornel West, *Prophecy Deliverance* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 31, 86.
 91. See, generally, Marable, *Ebony Tower*; A. Mutua, "Rise of Critical Race Theory"; West, *Race Matters*; and Asante, *Erasing Racism*.
 92. See Peller, "Race-Consciousness"; and Nikhil Pal Singh, "Toward an Effective Antiracism," in Marable, *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower*, 31–52.
 93. A. Mutua, "Rise of Critical Race Theory."
 94. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 11; see also Dyson, *Bill Cosby*, 47, note 63.
 95. Peller, "Race Consciousness."
 96. Afrocentricity may be read this way.
 97. This is how I interpret hooks, to use the term in hooks, *Killing Rage*.
 98. Asante, a central conceptualizer of Afrocentric theory, suggest that Afrocentricity is not a matter of color but a perspective. Asante, *The Painful Demise of Eurocentrism: An Afrocentric Response to Critics* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999), 112. It is primarily an orientation and approach to data. *Ibid.* "Afrocentricity [is] an intellectual theory for analyzing African behavior." *Ibid.*, 109, grounded "in the autonomy of the African agency." *Ibid.*, 108.
 99. *Ibid.*; see also Marable, *Ebony Tower*, 16–17.
 100. Asante, *Painful Demise*, 80, which refers to African scholar Kwame Anthony Appiah; see also Merlin R. Langley, "The Cool Pose: An Africentric Analysis," in Majors and Gordon, *American Black Male*, 231–44, which describes a psychological theory put forth by scholars such as Azibo and Baldwin.
 101. This is a term used by Asante, Asante, *Afrocentricity* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988).
 102. Jerome Schiele, "The Contour and Meaning of Afrocentric Social Work," *Journal of Black Studies* 27, no. 6 (July 1997), 805–8; Makau Mutua, "The Banjul Charter and the African Cultural Fingerprint: An Evaluation of the Language of Duties," *Virginia Journal of International Law* 35, no. 2 (1995), 339–81; see also Maulana Karenga, *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family Community and Culture* (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1999); and, generally, Asante, *Afrocentricity* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988), which notes that Afrocentricity has five distinguishing characteristics: (1) an intense interest in psychological location as determined by symbols, motifs, rituals, and signs; (2) a commitment to finding the subject-place of Africans in any societal, political, economic, or religious phenomenon with implications for questions of sex, gender, and class; (3) a defense of African cultural elements as historically valid in the context of art, music, and literature and a defense of a pan-African cultural connection based on broad responses to conditions, environments, and situations over time; (4) a celebration of "centeredness" and agency and a commitment to lexical refinement that eliminates pejoratives, including sexual and gender pejoratives about Africans or other people; and (5) a powerful imperative from historical sources to revise the collective text of African people as one in constant and consistent search for liberation and Maat [justice].
 103. Leith Mullings, "Reclaiming Culture," in Marable, *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower*, 212, which describes Afrocentricity's "attempt to highlight the importance of culture, to reclaim history, and to correct the distortions of Euro centrism" being a mirror in its negation of Eurocentrism. It also asserts that Afrocentrism is a child of Eurocentrism.
 104. West, *Race Matters*, 25–29, which discusses racial reasoning.
 105. For example, in earlier work Asante argued, "Homosexuality is a deviation from Afrocentric thought." Asante, *Afrocentricity*, 102. However, Haki Madhubuti has been seen as bemoaning the decline of male dominance in the black community. Madhubuti, *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? African American Families in Transition: Essays in Discovery, Solution, and Hope* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1990). For example, Asante, *Erasing Racism*, 96, says, "Afrocentricity is considered dangerous because it indicts Eurocentrism as racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic." This seems to suggest that Afrocentrism is not any of these. And Madhubuti's book titled *Tough Notes: A Healing Call for Creating Exceptional Black Men* (Chicago: Third World Press, 2002) issued a clarion call for men to participate in women's liberation.
 106. See the introduction to this volume, in which I argue, for instance, that in describing historical violence against African Americans in Asante's book *Erasing Racism*, he uses mostly examples of violence against men, even though the book is not about men. Further, Na'im Akbar's book, *Visions for Black Men* (Nashville, TN: Winston-Derek Publishers, 1991), supposedly provides a liberation program for black people but seems to promote a male-centered vision. See Barbara Ransby, "Afrocentrism, Cultural Nationalism, and the Problem with Essentialist Definitions of Race, Gender, and Sexuality," in Marable, *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower*, 220. Further, Afrocentrics have done a great deal of work on black men but have paid relatively little attention to the plight of black women or other members of black communities. However, many believe that sexism and heterosexism as part of Afrocentricity is changing as the theory develops—at least for some Afrocentric scholars.
 107. For instance, their and others' work on education highlights the way most school curriculums are Eurocentric, highlighting European achievement, reinforcing African absence, and promoting America as white, even though America has always been multilingual and multicultural and in some ways distinctly African. This, along with a complex of other factors, are said to affect the learning prospects of African American children.

Although such biases must necessarily affect African American girls, Afrocentric activist such as Kunjufu, in noting the higher suspension rates of black boys and their higher numbers in special education, has drawn attention to the fact that, among other factors, most of the teachers in American schools are white middle-class women. These women, he suggests, are likely bringing white middle-class gendered values to the classroom and thus are insensitive to various black cultural practices as displayed distinctly by black boys. Further, he argues that these teachers often in fact have lower expectations for black boys. This examination seems to suggest that the complex dynamics that play out in the educational system are raced, gendered, and classed.

108. This language is akin to Ransby, "Afrocentrism," 217, in her discussion of Afrocentricity.
109. Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," in *The Black Feminist Reader*, ed. Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000), 31.
110. *Ibid.*, 31–32.
111. Collins, "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought," in James and Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Feminist Reader*, 184, which notes that black women "have been neither passive victims of nor willing accomplices to their own domination." And suggesting that their resistance challenges thinking that subordinate groups either identify with the powerful and have no independent interpretation of their oppression or that their understandings are inferior.
112. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.
113. Collins, "The Politics of Black Feminist Thought," in *The Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, ed. Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim (New York: Routledge, 2003), 330.
114. *Ibid.*, 327.
115. hooks, *From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 18.
116. *Ibid.*, 24.
117. Carbado, "Construction."
118. Audre Lorde, "I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing across Sexualities," in McCann and Kim, *Feminist Theory Reader*, 255.
119. *Ibid.*, 256.
120. *Ibid.*
121. *Ibid.*
122. *Ibid.*
123. *Ibid.*, 259.
124. *Ibid.*, 255.
125. Marable, *Dispatching the Ebony Tower*, 19.
126. *Ibid.*
127. Joan Williams, "Fretting in the Force Fields: Why the Distribution of Social Power Has Proved So Hard to Change," *University of Missouri Kansas City Law Review* 71, no. 2 (2002), 500.
128. *Ibid.*
129. *Ibid.*
130. *Ibid.*, 501.
131. *Ibid.*