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Book Reviews

Angela G. Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005), xi + 371 pp. \$79.95 (cloth), \$24.95 (paper).

Historians of American rhetoric have had reason to be pleased lately. In the past few years, scholars have published studies of rhetorical practices within and beyond traditional academic settings, extensive archival work has broadened our understanding of rhetorical practices and introduced new texts to our canon, and the (at times out of favor) practice of “close reading” has been revitalized as scholarly presses have brought out various titles favoring this approach. In this vein, Angela G. Ray’s *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* takes on a subject previously neglected—the nineteenth-century rhetorical and cultural phenomenon of the lyceum—and carefully analyzes rhetorical practices it encompassed.

Focusing both on “specific moments” in the form of case studies of the rhetoric of particular lyceums, lyceum promoters, or speakers, and on “the broader context in which such moments occurred” (10), Ray provides readers with an engaging, wide-ranging examination of various manifestations of the nineteenth-century lyceum. Her study of the lyceum does not propose that this rhetorical movement was monolithic or neatly categorized; instead, she aptly describes the lyceum as “a discontinuous, culture-making practice” that allowed for “a high degree of variability” within the “ordinary activities” that took place within particular groups (1–2), featured both “dominant and reformist discourse,” and both “promoted and also restricted the reception of voices raised in calls for social change” (8).

Ray’s Introduction explores the evolving meanings of the word “lyceum” in the nineteenth-century United States and articulates her view that lyceum activity shaped members’ understanding of what it meant to be “American” and constituted “public selves and public cultures” (7). She also outlines her methodological approach, which depends upon “paying close attention to specific moments” in order to make “broader statements about cultural formation” (9). Chapter 1 offers a detailed history of the nineteenth-century lyceum in the United States, tracing the shift from societies devoted to mutual instruction and education to commercially driven ventures featuring popular speakers. While early lyceums, Ray demonstrates, suppressed conflict and stressed member participation, by the 1850s more divisive topics and well-known celebrity lecturers became the order of the day.

In Chapter 2, Ray explores the ideal of the lyceum conceived by Josiah Holbrook, a key promoter of the movement, as disseminated in his journal the *Family Lyceum*, published in 1832 and 1833. This publication, Ray demonstrates, was a “rhetorical representation of the lyceum’s foundational vision” rather than “a model to direct the actual operation of lyceum organizations” (49); as such, it offered readers the knowledge and behavior expected of the ideal citizen of the time through anecdotes, reports, and quizzes. In order to understand the shifts that had taken place in the lyceum by the 1850s, Chapter 3 examines the Young Men’s Association of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, using the minutes of the group’s board of directors, the correspondence of its president, and press reports. “Education” and “entertainment” had become divided by this period in the minds of lyceum promoters, who saw the audience not as participants but as a group that needed to be both directed (as potential beneficiaries of the improvement the lyceum could offer) and patronized (as customers).

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on two particular lyceum lecturers—the African American orator Frederick Douglass and Anna Dickinson, a white lecturer who came to prominence stumping for Republican candidates in the 1863 elections and became a sought-after lyceum speaker. Both Douglass and Dickinson, Ray demonstrates, simultaneously worked within and modified lyceum conventions in order to challenge nineteenth-century views of race and gender and to advocate for freedom and reform. In close analyses of three of Douglass’s speeches, Ray examines how Douglass “constructed knowledge as collective common sense” (128) in order to affirm human freedom within the constraints of the lyceum lecture, relied on both black and white models of achievement to expand the nineteenth-century ideology of self-improvement, and articulated “an ideal of Americanness” that both affirmed the singular prominence of the United States and critiqued its failures to honor its “rhetoric of freedom and equality” (139). Ray analyzes Dickinson’s 1869–70 lecture “Whited Sepulchres” as “a popular form of the Protestant sermon” (147) which cast the female speaking persona as an observer, interpreter, critic, and reformer of the world around her.

Chapter 6 weaves together the analyses of the previous chapters in order to understand the changes within the rhetoric of the lyceum, particularly the shifts in the roles of audiences, the knowledges endorsed by the lyceum as useful and appropriate, the functions of the lyceum, the rhetorics that emerged from the movement, and the meanings—albeit “instab[le] and “ever-shifting” (188)—that it produced.

Ray paints a comprehensive picture that highlights larger tendencies and tensions within nineteenth-century rhetoric. For the most part, *The Lyceum and Public Culture* is about the discourse of white Protestants (and, in the case of Douglass, a black rhetor’s oratory within white-dominated groups), and she is appropriately self-conscious throughout these analyses about how class and race shaped and limited the rhetoric of lyceum promoters and members. The fourth chapter fills an important gap in scholarship on Frederick Douglass’s rhetoric. Not only have scholars generally not “examined his lyceum speaking” (118), as Ray notes, they have frequently posited

a too-simple trajectory for Douglass—from an early speaker constrained by white conventions to a freer rhetor—that is complicated by a close study of his lyceum speaking. While Douglass did become more autonomous as his career evolved, Ray demonstrates that Douglass continued to negotiate the tensions among adopting, adapting, and challenging dominant rhetorical modes and conventions for white audiences.

There are, however, some limitations to Ray's study. Chapter 1 includes a short section on lyceums created, led, and attended by African Americans (30–32). Since, as she notes, these lyceums “departed markedly” from the “trends” of white-dominated organizations (30)—and since there have been extensive, detailed studies published of these groups—this section does not seem to enhance her study, which she notes will focus most extensively on the lyceum's “dominant British American mode” (14). More problematically, she gives short shrift to organizations which cannot be adequately discussed in two pages and makes generalizations that fail to account for the range of practices in African American groups.

In addition, Ray's treatment of the larger historical and social contexts surrounding the lyceums she studies is occasionally incomplete. For example, Douglass's comments about his representation as speaker for his race (119) should be placed in terms of African Americans' commitment to the community through public action, and his somewhat negative comments about Africa (127) and his simultaneous embrace and critique of American principles and values (136–39) are better comprehended when viewed as representative of many nineteenth-century African Americans' views of Africa and America. These are, though, relatively small limitations in a solid, well-researched study that has much to offer students and teachers of nineteenth-century rhetoric.

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Joshua Gunn, *Modern Occult Rhetoric: Mass Media and the Drama of Secrecy in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2005), xxix + 340 pp. \$49.75 (cloth).

Joshua Gunn is a fool. Or, more precisely, the Fool. The handsomely designed cover of *Modern Occult Rhetoric* reproduces the Fool card from the classic Rider-Waite Tarot deck with Gunn's name in place of the card's title. The Fool card shows a garishly dressed young man, holding a flower and carrying a pack over his shoulder, apparently lost in thought and not realizing he is about to fall off a cliff. A small dog yaps at his heel, trying to warn him.

The card is one of the 22 Major Arcana (emblematic designs representing archetypal characters or things in human experience, such as the Magician, the Hanged Man, or the Hermit). It survives in the modern playing card deck as the Joker. The Joker is the “wild card,” with no fixed meaning. Although an experienced Tarot reader will interpret a card's meaning only in relationship to the full spread of

cards in the reading, the Fool card has a conventional set of associations. Since the card is numbered zero, it comes at the beginning of the full Tarot deck, suggesting that the Fool is embarking on a journey that will take him through the mysteries of life symbolized by the Major Arcana. Although the Fool is about to fall off a cliff, no danger is implied. He is off to a fresh start, open to the infinite possibilities life can bring, but he needs the little dog (sometimes interpreted as the warning voice of the unconscious) to remind him not to get too carried away.

The cover of *Modern Occult Rhetoric* is thus an emblem of the themes Gunn will explore in his book: interpretation of hidden meanings, the indeterminacy of language, and the risk of self. As he announces in the Introduction, the book is “about the ways in which individuals use language (and the ways language uses individuals) to harbor secrets, creating groups of insiders and outsiders” (xv). And although Gunn displays an expert command of rhetorical and literary theory, cultural/media studies, the primary documents of Anglo-American occultism, and the sociological literature on the topic, he consistently plays the Fool in his writing, intentionally breaking the conventions of the scholarly monograph, and the reader is better off for it.

The book starts by evoking the experience many American academics had upon their first exposure to French Theory in the early 1980s—the sense that something terribly important is going on underneath a surface of impenetrable jargon. Gunn cites a passage from Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*, and says that readers of that text

will immediately acknowledge that the un-doing, schizo-phronesis of desiring production and its rippling effects in the world’s ever-widening, rhizomatic onto-theology of thinking/being was originally mapped by Spinoza. To recognize the flows of desire enabling and disabling a litany of couplings and splits and the many, energetic flows and dams between the conatus and anima—indeed, the fecal gift and the undead eidola—is to celebrate the infinite attributes of “the One.” (xvii)

Gunn goes on this way for two pages and then admits to the reader that the “preceding prose was intentionally tortuous,” designed to demonstrate formally the book’s focus on invention, reading, and interpretation of mysterious language. Like the Fool, he steps off the cliff by comparing academic jargon to the seemingly marginal literature of the Occult. I can imagine the average professional in rhetorical studies glancing at this book and thinking, “This is a totally marginal topic. Madam Blavatsky, Aleister Crowley, and Satanism might be of specialist interest or one more hip cultural studies fad, but what do they have to do with the typical themes of rhetorical scholarship?” In reply, I would say that Gunn’s case studies show how modern occult rhetoric *matters*, because it illustrates how difficult language is used to divide and unite readers, and how we “cannot help but play the game of secrecy, even in our contemporary age of abject publicity—of webcams, work-place monitoring, and ‘reality television’—because language and its use easily lend themselves to mystery” (xxi). Even if early twentieth-century occult discourse about magic and metaphysical secrets has died, what Gunn terms the “occultic” lives on as a discourse of secrecy and social discrimination. A close reading of the traditional occult texts

helps us appreciate “how widespread the occultic has become as a contemporary rhetorical form” (xxv).

The book is divided into two parts: “Esoterica” and “Exoterica.” In the first part, Gunn defines the occult in terms of an “origin narrative” dating back to the Middle Ages and Renaissance, culminating in the nineteenth-century occult revival by the French author Eliphas Lévi. After an entertaining ethnographic “interlude” about Gunn’s experience at an occult gathering in Minneapolis, he identifies the generic features of occultism in terms of a theory of rhetorical invention, or an “occult poetics.” Occult poetics is based on, so to speak, a desire to “eff the ineffable,” and is caught in a paradox or rhetorical antinomy: “The belief is this: (A) spiritual knowledge is translinguistic or ‘ineffable.’ The action is this: (B) one can write and speak about spiritual knowledge” (49). Yet this antinomy is not limited to occult poetics because, following Kenneth Burke, mystery and mystification are inevitable features of language itself. The last two chapters of the “Esoterica” section are detailed accounts of H. P. Blavatsky’s writings and their reception in the popular press, and a close reading of Aleister Crowley’s *The Book of the Law* (helpfully included in Appendix 2). The Crowley chapter is particularly insightful and entertaining because of the parallels Gunn draws between Crowley’s “immanent hermeneutics” and the reading practices of the “New Criticism.”

Part 2 of the book, “Exoterica,” discusses the undoing of the occult tradition over the course of the twentieth century. In two chapters about Crowley’s effort to establish his occult authority in popular consciousness, Gunn shows the difficulty of maintaining authority over ineffable secrets in a society saturated with publicity. While the occult tradition as revived by Lévi, the Order of the Golden Dawn, Blavatsky, and Crowley was the province of a wealthy elite, by the 1960s occultism, in the form of Satanism, began to be democratized and appeal to the lower and middle classes. Here Gunn’s analysis takes a Marxist turn, discussing the Satanic panic of the late 1980s as fueled by the “excluded disempowered,” usually young white men. The rise of the “goth” subculture, the publicity stunts of Anton LaVey’s Church of Satan, and sensationalist television coverage of Satanism illustrate the demise of the occult and its transformation, via commodification, into the occultic, as a visual form divorced from traditional occult content. Occult content is transformed from authority and secrecy to the imaginative and the aesthetic. The final chapter of the book discusses the Roman Polanski film *The Ninth Gate* as an allegory of this transformation of the occult into the occultic.

Gunn’s epilogue returns to a discussion of his humiliating experiences as a graduate student confronting difficult theoretical prose. There has been endless discussion in recent years about the increasing density of academic writing in the humanities. The journal *Philosophy and Literature* hands out an annual Bad Writing award (with Judith Butler as a typical winner). The Sokal affair sparked further ridicule of High Theory. Gunn refuses both extremes of this debate over difficult academic prose, insisting that we focus instead on “the relational structure of revelation and secrecy” (235). In searching for an appropriate rhetorical form for scholarship in the brave new corporate and globalized university, he contends that we

should embrace the figure of the Fool. Gunn's book embodies this rhetorical form, performing the difficult trick of combining rigorous textual analysis and philosophical reflection with "foolish" accounts of his own personal experience as a student, teacher, and scholar of rhetoric. By not taking himself too seriously, Gunn heightens the seriousness of the drama of secrecy he finds in the rhetoric of the occult.

By way of concluding, I have a few comments to make about the limitations of Gunn's account and some possible research trajectories to follow in continuing the discussion of magic and the occult in rhetorical studies. First, we need a fuller account of the notions of secrecy and magic in the history of rhetoric itself. We know that Gorgias, for example, viewed oratory as an irresistible magical force. John O. Ward, in a 1988 *Rhetorica* article,¹ describes the history of rhetoric as a dialectic between rhetoric as magic and rhetoric as control. Stuart Clark, in his 1997 study *Thinking with Demons*,² illustrates the connection between Ramist rhetorical theory and demonology in the English Renaissance. The plain style of Puritan rhetoric was clearly a reaction against the mystifications of medieval hermeneutics and the high Ciceronian style of Anglicanism. Kant's rejection of rhetoric in the *Critique of Judgment* is based on its seemingly magical violation of individual autonomy.³ Second, it was startling to me that Gunn did not discuss the affinities between the early twentieth-century occult tradition and fascism. Hitler's interest in astrology and Nordic magic is well known; it would be interesting to analyze *Raiders of the Lost Ark* along the lines of Gunn's reading of *The Ninth Gate*. One key figure in Italian fascism was Julius Evola, an Italian writer on yoga and the occult, who has influenced heavily the neo-fascist movement in Italy and the New Right in France and England. Finally, a missing part of Gunn's analysis is the role of the occult in high culture in the twentieth century. William Butler Yeats' *A Vision* and James Merrill's great poem *The Changing Light at Sandover* (the only epic composed with the aid of a Ouija board) are but two examples of recent literary interest in the occult.⁴

Yet these are minor quibbles. Perhaps the greatest achievement of *Modern Occult Rhetoric* is its integration of rhetorical theory, close textual analysis, and cultural studies. I and others have remarked, perhaps too intemperately, on the conflict between rhetorical and cultural studies in communication, which has often manifested itself as a dialogue of the deaf. Gunn shows how the two research traditions can complement each other effectively. His book deserves to be read and reread as a pathbreaking work not only within the specialized research of esoteric/occult studies, but in rhetorical theory and media studies also.

Notes

- [1] John O. Ward, "Magic and Rhetoric from Antiquity to the Renaissance: Some Ruminations," *Rhetorica* 6 (1988): 57–118.
- [2] Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

- [3] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).
- [4] William Butler Yeats, *A Vision* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1938); James Merrill, *The Changing Light at Sandover* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

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Davis W. Houck and David E. Dixon, eds, *Rhetoric, Religion, and the Civil Rights Movement: 1954–1965* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 1002 pp. US\$44.95 (paper).

Historians have focused enormous attention on the racial agitation of the 1950s and 1960s—the largest mass movement for human rights in U.S. history. The history department in most reputable universities now employs a specialist in the civil rights era. Essentially repeating the narrative that the white male reporters wove during that period, historians during the 1970s and 1980s often spotlighted the career of Martin Luther King, Jr., sometimes creating the impression that virtually every conflict revolved around a single “great man” of history. During the 1990s and 2000s, a much more variegated picture emerged as scholars broke down the movement state by state, city by city, and local leader by local leader. Autobiographies by aging protestors added color and definition to the picture. Suddenly, Rosa Parks seemed far less important to the Montgomery Bus Boycott than did Jo Ann Robinson, who, along with her Women’s Political Council, awaited another bus arrest so they could organize the initial bus boycott. Suddenly, Fannie Lou Hamer and Robert Moses seemed much more significant in Mississippi—a huge civil rights battleground—than did King. Suddenly, King’s cohort Fred Shuttlesworth emerged as indispensable in the crucible of Birmingham. Such luminaries as Hamer, Moses, Shuttlesworth, Ella Baker, Ruby Doris Robinson, Anne Braden, and Gloria Richardson now have slipped out from King’s shadow to receive thoroughly researched biographies. Folks in religious studies have contributed also to civil rights scholarship. Legal theorists have examined court cases related to the struggle, including *New York Times v. Sullivan* (1964) and—especially—*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). And leading public intellectuals, such as Michael Eric Dyson, have weighed the era.

Unfortunately, rhetorical critics lag behind. They largely have failed to theorize the dynamics and strategies of social change embodied either in the nonviolence of the 1950s and early 1960s or in the Black Power phenomenon of the late 1960s and early 1970s. They also have largely failed in the less complex task of examining civil rights oratory. Only a small number of rhetorical critics, for example, have ever bothered to analyze King’s “I Have a Dream.” And, with the exceptions of King and Malcolm X, racial protestors from the 1950s through the 1970s are almost wholly invisible in rhetorical research. The absence of these activists in rhetorical studies implicitly, but strongly, reinforces the false, popular notion that King led all agitators and the equally false notion that none of those dissenters were noteworthy

orators. But, as historians have demonstrated, many orators contributed mightily to the civil rights struggle.

In a commendable effort to highlight the eloquence of overlooked advocates of black civil rights, Davis Houck and David Dixon have scoured archives to assemble an anthology of religious orations during the critical period 1954–1965. This huge, highly diverse collection features 129 sermons and speeches by no fewer than 93 orators. Represented are Jews, Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Disciples of Christ. Here national actors compete with obscure, workaday ministers. Detailed Biblical exegesis rubs against appeals that are barely religious at all. Enraged, passionate denunciations threaten to drown quiet voices. Solemnity shakes hands with outrageous nightclub humor. Some of the least-known of these speakers deliver some of the most riveting appeals. To open these pages is to encounter the incisive, mordant wit of surgeon T. R. M. Howard, the sly indirection of zany editor P. D. East, the fury of Dave Dennis, and the directness of local white ministers who were fired simply for espousing racial justice.

Embodying a long tradition of African American humor, comedian Dick Gregory uproariously and trenchantly mocks horrific and absurd white practices:

Never in the history of slavery had you had a white man that would go out in the barn and have a sex affair with all the slave women like this dog did. . . . The biggest fool in the world know if you wanna segregate me and keep me down you don't put me in the back [of the bus] where I can watch you for 200 years. The biggest fool in the world know if you wanna keep me down, you don't keep me under conditions where I can become stronger than you. (600)

And [a white man] even went so stone crazy he tear gassing our [kids]. But we raise his kids. (601)

Two of the most impressive speakers evoke thwarted dreams of motherhood. Mamie Till-Bradley provides the most electrifying oration in this entire volume—a detailed and exceedingly emotional, yet utterly cogent account of the torture, murder, and funeral of her innocent 14-year old son, Emmett Till, whose death helped ignite the Montgomery Bus Boycott and thousands of public protests over ensuing years. Marion King explains protests that led to the death of her unborn child. In her cautious yet endearing speech she recounts the “unadulterated hatred” she encountered during the previous summer (511). And, in a pivotal moment, she declares: “I wonder again and again what is the matter with the white people of Albany[, Georgia]” (512). Despite the violence she faced, the loss of her child, and time spent in jail, she turns to faith in “some master plan, some purpose for it all” and offers encouragement and a sense of solidarity: “I have had more moments of real hope than of despair. I see in some white Southerners of just and generous spirit ‘Signs of the coming of the Lord,’ and I know that ‘His truth is marching on’” (512).

Within this patchwork quilt of a book, one can identify several general trends. Many addresses amount to variations of the classic African American jeremiad, which blends appeals to Christianity and to America’s founding documents, especially the Declaration of Independence. Eighteenth-century anti-slavery speakers began to

shape this sturdy, yet elastic oratorical form; nineteenth-century abolitionists, such as Frances Ellen Watkins and Frederick Douglass, perfected it; and Douglass and Ida B. Wells adjusted it well into the postbellum period.¹ In this book Martin Luther King, Jr.'s mentor Benjamin Mays supplies his version of this jeremiad, as do King, Hamer; Shuttlesworth, John Lewis, James Bevel, Mildred Bell Johnson, and many others.

Two white ministers, Eugene Carson Blake and Will Campbell, however, depart from this jeremiad. Blake cites Acts 5:29 in support of Christianity over law: "But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men'" (567). In a quirky address Campbell urges listeners to rely on Christianity, not institutions or "cultural landmarks": "Our message is that these landmarks are irrelevant. Let 'em crumble. Quit trying to prop them up. The quicker they fall the sooner the Christian message might get a hearing" (387).

Speakers also repeatedly present another argument: racism undercuts the ability of American "democracy" to defeat international communism—a conviction that, as Mary Dudziak argues, was shared by political elites in Washington and significantly boosted support for the movement.²

During this era, liberal Protestant seminaries normally featured rationalist, "scientific" approaches to Biblical studies aimed to strip the Bible of its folklore and to uncover its more historically "authentic" elements. Ignoring these approaches, many orators in this anthology offer vague appeals to broad, "reasonable" principles of scripture—such as the "fatherhood of God"—that appear to dictate racial inclusion. Others—including Martin Luther King, Jr., Hamer, and Shuttlesworth—pointedly reject historical/rationalist approaches to the Bible and enliven current events by fitting them into the coordinates of Biblical narratives. Comparisons to Moses are popular: Dennis likens Robert Moses to the Biblical Moses; Shuttlesworth interprets Medgar Evers as a new Moses.

Crafting a related form of Biblical argument, Till-Bradley, Robert Spike, and Ed King seem to update Tertullian's famous claim—"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"—by proclaiming that God might turn evil into good by using the murders of civil rights martyrs to redeem a sinful nation. Perhaps Spike spoke for a number of Bible-centered orators when he announced: "The Bible can really only be read when it is read as a commentary on our times as well as ancient Judea" (673). Speeches by associates of Dr. King—Mays, Shuttlesworth, Bevel, and Wyatt Walker—include materials that overlap with passages in King's orations that are not included in this volume but that are gradually being published by the Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project of Stanford University.³ One wonders whether these speakers were swapping riffs back and forth, a bit like jazz musicians.

Although Houck and Dixon include scintillating oratory by Hamer, Baker, Till-Bradley, Marion King, Mary McLeod Bethune, and other women, the editors admit that, despite their best efforts to locate speeches, "relatively few women are represented here" due to a relative "lack of primary source materials" (9). It may be the case that, despite the relative abundance of women's autobiographies about the movement, only a fairly small number of these women's orations were preserved.

In their otherwise strong Introduction, however, Houck and Dixon fail to note that certain female activists—most notably Pauli Murray, Casey Hayden, and Mary King—objected to patriarchal leadership and defined the entire movement differently than did King, Shuttlesworth, and other leading male orators. These women fused the struggle for racial equality with the struggle for gender equality. Murray and Anna Arnold Hedgeman, for example, strongly objected to the exclusion of female speakers at the massive March on Washington, which King capped with “I Have a Dream.” Perhaps these women did not give large numbers of long, well-preserved addresses, but their concern for gender equality and their general prominence in the civil rights movement means that that movement served as one of several sites for the birth of Second Wave American feminism. The civil rights movement was not simply about race.

Houck and Dixon deserve an award for publishing badly neglected speeches, thus making the task of rhetorical examination of the civil rights movement far easier than ever before. Now rhetorical critics can much more readily investigate the larger dynamics of social change propelled by many national, regional, and local speakers. Critics also can explore the achievements and limitations of Christian reconciliationist rhetoric, which is abundantly exemplified here. Finally, gazing at the pivotal year of 1965, researchers can investigate more handily many activists’ shift from Christian nonviolence to Black Power and Black Nationalism. While facilitating research, *Rhetoric, Religion, and the Civil Rights Movement* also supplies a provocative and emotional journey through a tumultuous time.

Notes

- [1] See Keith D. Miller, “Plymouth Rock Landed on Us: Malcolm X’s Whiteness Theory as a Basis for Alternative Literacy,” *College Composition and Communication* 56 (December 2004): 199–222.
- [2] See Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).
- [3] See Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson et al., vols. 1–6 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992–2006).

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Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), xxi + 388 pp. US\$59.95 (cloth), \$22.50 (paper).

In the Epilogue of her volume, Michele Mitchell expresses the central hope that, minimally, she has recast “late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century African American thought [to reveal] the centrality of gender, sexuality, and anxieties about collective reproduction” (247). *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* realizes Mitchell’s hope and achieves much more. An intellectual and social history, or, in her words, a “social history of

thought" (13), *Righteous Propagation* analyzes the wrangle of voices and views expressed by African Americans intra-racially, to demonstrate that themes of gender, sex, and reproduction were constitutive in discussions of black racial destiny between 1877 and 1930. Mitchell cogently establishes the primacy of these themes within African American discourse and reveals how race activists politicized the most private aspects of black life to ensure that their race did not merely survive, but attained respectably.

The primary organization of *Righteous Propagation* is thematic. Each chapter features key issues that African American activists articulated in their discussions of racial destiny. A secondary chronological arrangement in the volume illuminates major shifts in the debate. Chapters 1 and 2 cover the debate over African American emigration and United States imperialism, respectively, from 1877–1910; however, most of the book, Chapters 3–7, covers key issues discussed between 1890 and 1920, the period when the “debate over racial destiny took place *writ large*” (105). Topics include sexuality and reproduction, sexuality and conduct, black home life, “colored dolls,” and miscegenation. Chapter 8 examines the gendered and sexualized politics in the “race first” rhetoric of Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association beyond the 1920s. An Epilogue and Prologue frame these chapters.

To make her case, Mitchell traverses a wide range of discourse that includes correspondence, speeches, sociological studies, conduct manuals, campaigns, newspaper articles, and fiction. Mitchell’s analytic thrust concerns the extent to which the black discourse of the period features a preoccupation with the performance of either women’s or men’s gender roles as they relate to collective survival. She argues, for example, that “black manhood” was the predominant theme in discussions of emigration and imperialism and their attendant issue, colonization. Drawing from African American-authored historical romances published between 1899 and 1905, Mitchell uncovers a hyper-masculinity that functioned as “literary commentary on masculinity and empire” and provided “a unique opportunity” to rebut “popular stereotypes about black manhood” (68). Her analysis reveals that black empire- and nation-building discourses were fraught with contradiction; “black men swept up in the rhetoric of empire . . . overlooked how their own desires for dominion had the potential to oppress other people of color” (15).

The focus on black manhood in the first two chapters is the exception. Discourse on the other key issues mainly targets black women, and reflects deeply held notions about womanhood and manhood. African American activists saw the bedroom and home environment as sites where changes in conduct and standards could accord the race more respectability; thus the discourse harbors the conventional assumption “that the race’s home life was firmly within the province of womanhood, women were expected to steer youths from urban vice, keep errant husbands in check, and maintain a sanitary home environment for the sake of producing better children” (172). African American women found themselves in an “oxymoronic position: they were simultaneously caricatured by white Americans as diseased contaminants *and* characterized by Afro-Americans as primary agents in regenerating the race’s home life” (172).

A similar inequity is evident in the discussion of “miscegenation,” a label Mitchell uses reluctantly, when black leaders expressed alarm over what they perceived to be the “whitening” of the black race, but tended not to consider “whether errant black men diluted the race or white passing men were raising ostensibly white families.” Black leaders tended to focus, instead, on women—“their exploitation, their complicity, their phenotypical attributes—in a sustained fashion that ultimately placed a burden on . . . women of African descent” (215). Significantly, but unsurprisingly, Mitchell’s analysis reveals how discussions among African Americans that considered their collective future were gendered inequitably; activists asked women to bear the lion’s share of uplifting the race.

Righteous Propagation is as much about class as it is about race, gender, sexuality, and reproduction. “Race” men and women, members of “aspiring” and “elite” classes of African Americans, imbued with a passion to uplift the race, meted out advice to the “working poor” about how to improve their habits and morals (xix–xx). Mitchell sheds light on the “internal contradictions, silences, and inconsistencies” (14) of the “better classes,” who politicized the most private aspects of black life. Their well-intentioned exhortations and admonitions to the masses bore marks of popular ideologies and pseudo-scientific theories of the day, including Anglo-Saxon imperialism, eugenics, and social Darwinism. Their calls for uplift sounded strikingly similar to pronouncements by whites of widespread lasciviousness and degeneracy among blacks.

Mitchell’s thoughtful analysis is enhanced by engaging prose. As the passage below from her Prologue illustrates, she personifies archival material in a way that invites attentive reading.

An epidemic hit African American communities during the twilight of Reconstruction. It was an affliction with peculiar, distinctive symptoms: those affected generally reported feeling agitated, and a few began acting in a single-minded or furtive manner. Some women and men started speaking about leaving their spouses; others became determined to part with earthly belongings; still others began to embrace risky behavior. (3)

“Liberia fever” is the epidemic, and “nineteen-year-old Annie Williams was among the afflicted living” (4). Likewise, from Mitchell’s humane description in a later chapter, readers can visualize Maud Evangeline Gary, a black six-year-old with a doll that was “ordinary in many respects; it was clothed, had combable [*sic*] hair and was roughly the size of a toddler. . . . Maud likely spent hours on end playing with the companion ‘she loved[d] very dearly’; the little girl might have taken her playmate everywhere” (173). Mitchell supplies the probable scenario that

sometime during July or August, 1915, Maud’s mother had compiled a hope-filed letter, tucked a snapshot of her daughter and doll into an envelop and sent off her entry to *New York Age*, sponsor of the “better babies” contest. Her mother confessed, “I do not allow her to play with [white] dolls. . . . The only way to make race-loving men and women is to start in early child hood.” (173)

With this scenario at the opening of Chapter 6, Mitchell artfully begins to establish the potent connection black leaders formed between cultural artifacts like dolls and the survival of the race.

Rhetorical scholars will appreciate the plethora of discursive practices Mitchell mines for her study, the primacy she accords texts, and her cogent textual interpretations. *Righteous Propagation* would be especially useful in upper-level and graduate seminars in African American rhetoric, which generally tend to examine outer-directed calls for equality and justice. The internal dynamics and various stratifications within the African American community are often overlooked or framed dichotomously. For a seminar on discourses of race and gender, *Righteous Propagation* could be paired with George Fredrickson's seminal volume, *Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1814*.¹ Fredrickson's study establishes the intellectual and sociopolitical exigencies that compelled African Americans to contemplate the destiny of their race. Read together, the texts illuminate the interplay between racial discourses.

Mitchell's study furthers our understanding of why oppressed people appropriate mainstream discourses for their own ends, and intersects race, class, gender, and sexuality as elements of identity formation and fragmentation within a community.

Note

- [1] George M. Fredrickson, *Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

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Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), xi + 268 pp. \$29.95 (hardcover).

Wendy Brown presents an often unsettling challenge to contemporary liberals and leftists in her latest book, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. Tolerance, Brown argues, has become a dominant theme for conservatives and leftists alike, invoked in a wide range of contexts from gay marriage to international conflict. Through what is akin to rhetorical analysis (although Brown is in the Political Science department at Berkeley), Brown traces “tolerance” through a series of historical and contemporary discursive configurations in order to assess its covert ideological labor. Brown reveals that despite its progressive allure, “tolerance” iterates subordination and marginalization, promoting Western supremacy and aggression “even as it veils them in the modest dress of tolerance” (7).

In her first two chapters, Brown outlines her theoretical and methodological commitment. The remaining five chapters analyze the circulation of “tolerance” in diverse contexts including the construction of “Jewishness” as racialized identity, academic discussions of civilization and culture clash, and a museum that functions as an encomium.

I was immediately struck by the resonances between Brown's description of her methodology and the rhetorical concept of the ideograph. In her first chapter, Brown pinpoints tolerance as a "discourse of depoliticization," a political value with considerable "plasticity" that is not encoded in law but "occurs off the radar screen of the formally political" (12–13). Tolerance, like the ideograph, is "protean in meaning," and is a discourse of power with "strong rhetorical functions" (4, 9). Tolerance acquires synchronic meaning through its relation with other power-laden discourses, including "equality, freedom, culture, enfranchisement, and Western civilization"; however, it also has a diachronic dimension as it carries traces of its history and "leans on its dispersed heritage for a good deal of its power and legitimacy in the present" (38). Tolerance is an intriguing discourse precisely because of its diverse history of usages. Brown concludes her introductory chapter with the theme of her later analyses, "One sure sign of a depoliticizing trope or discourse is the easy and politically crosscutting embrace of a political project bearing its name" (16). Brown's method is to trace these usages of tolerance throughout discourse, attentive to both continuities and ruptures.

Brown constructs the theoretical scaffolding for her analysis in Chapter 2, "Tolerance as a Discourse of Power." Tolerance, despite its apparent connotations of humility and respect for the other, covertly sustains hierarchical relationships because it "provides a gracious way of allowing one's tastes to be violated. It offers a robe of modest superiority in exchange for yielding" (25). Tolerance is a luxury of power that provides a unique way of sustaining the threatened entity that it seemingly assimilates: "Tolerance is less an extension toward a potentially intrusive or toxic difference than the management of the threat represented by that difference" (28). Brown consistently reminds the reader that tolerance allows for the "management" of antagonisms, not their resolution. Furthermore, in the contemporary discursive landscape, tolerance has become a discourse about identity rather than belief. This change corresponds with a larger shift from "sovereign power" to "governmentality," marked by alterations in procedures of subject formation that Brown sketches by way of Foucault.

In Chapter 3, "Tolerance as Supplement: The 'Jewish Question' and the 'Woman Question,'" Brown describes gender as an anomaly in tolerance discourse. In debates over gender equality, tolerance does not come to the fore as a productive discourse: we "tolerate" different ethnic groups, but we do not "tolerate" women: "Equality, not tolerance, is our conventional rubric for speaking about gender desegregation and gender equity" (48). Brown offers two case studies to illuminate this anomaly, examining "the discursive construction of Jewishness" to illustrate how "the discourse of tolerance shifted its object from conscience and belief to racialized identity and soul" (50). In this context, tolerance emerged as a supplement to equality or "that which finesses the incompleteness of equality—making equality 'true' when it cannot become so on its own terms" (70–71). Tolerance emerges as a potent discourse when a group difference that threatens the definition of the whole must be both managed and sustained in its difference. Women, "in their dispersal and in the sexualization of their identity," do not present such a problem; "[T]hey are not

perceived as a solidaristic group, nor does their manifest difference threaten to disappear" (71). The discourse of tolerance "is not needed for a group whose incorporation does not erase the visible sign of difference," according to Brown (76).

Brown engages a sustained discussion of Foucault's notion of governmentality in her fourth chapter. In the twentieth century, tolerance "no longer emanates only from state and church but is promulgated from a variety of sites in civil society," a key marker of governmentality (78). Brown offers an important corrective to Foucault: while Foucault's concept tends to downplay the role of the state, Brown argues that the state remains "the fulcrum of political legitimacy in late modern nations" (83). Through an analysis of the discourses of gay marriage debates and political rhetorics of Islam after 9/11, Brown argues that tolerance enables "Janus-faced actions" on the part of the state. The state "represents itself as securing social equality and rhetorically enjoins the citizenry from prejudice and persecution," while simultaneously engaging in "extralegal and persecutorial actions toward the very group that it calls upon the citizenry to be tolerant toward" (84). On a deeper level, tolerance discourse ontologizes and naturalizes difference as it "casts human society as a crowded late modern Hobbesian universe in which difference rather than sameness is the source and site of our enemy" (88). This has the effect of undermining the public sphere by suppressing open discussion of conflicts, a "routine privatization of sites of difference" (88) that "discursively buries the social powers constitutive of difference" (89). In the case of gay marriage and Islam, tolerance makes antagonism permanent: "Tolerance arises at the dusk of Enlightenment Man not to relieve us of the problem of difference but to inscribe its power and permanence" (90).

In Chapter 5, "Tolerance as Museum Object," Brown critically engages the Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance (MOT) in Los Angeles, founded in 1993. She writes, "This dazzling ensemble of sound-and-light shows and interactive computer sites is gathered under the hallowed moral value of tolerance and the hallowed epistemological status of a museum" (107). Brown is critical of the museum, arguing that it continues the pattern of depoliticization by ignoring history and power in its accounts of ethnicized hostility and conflict "in which ethnicity, culture, religion, race, and belief are reified as essential, the results of natural enmity regarded as inherent in 'difference'" (109). In her reading, the museum ultimately equates tolerance with thoughtfulness and bigotry with mindlessness, eliding power and history from the patrons' views.

Chapter 6, "Subjects of Tolerance: Why We are Civilized and They Are Barbarians," engages the function of tolerance in constituting "identity" and "culture" as key terms in discourses of global conflict. Her discussion moves from Samuel Huntington to Freud to contemporary presidential rhetoric. Brown focuses on a theme that has been the subtext of her earlier chapters: "In recent years, culture has become a cardinal object of tolerance and intolerance" (150). The rise of culture as an explanation for political conflict is tied to the historical shift in objects of tolerance from "belief," largely viewed as subjective, to "identity," largely viewed as objective. What Brown describes as "the 'culturalization' of political conflict" is a process whereby political and civil conflict is explained as "a cultural clash, whether in

international or domestic politics” (150). In this rubric, the rhetoric of tolerance plays a key role. The function of tolerance is to lessen hostility and achieve peaceful coexistence, naturalizing the source of the conflict as inhering in ontologized “cultural differences.” The discourse of culture is not an even one, as Brown describes. “Though ‘culture’ is what nonliberal peoples are imagined to be ruled and ordered by,” she writes, “liberal peoples are considered to *have* culture or cultures” (150). In this discursive context, then, tolerance remains a gesture of the powerful.

In her final chapter, “Tolerance As/In Civilizational Discourse,” Brown concludes by reflecting on how tolerance is used to construct the West and its other. Familiar binary oppositions, including free vs. fundamentalist, civilized vs. barbaric, and individualist vs. organicist or collective, are discursively linked to maintain structures of inequality. Brown writes, “Whenever one pair of terms is present, it works metonymically to imply the others, in part because these pairs are popularly considered to have an organic association with one another in the world” (177). Tolerance helps to sustain this associative structure and its potency largely lies in the fact that it appears on the surface to dismantle these oppositions. This is precisely the danger that Brown identifies: the apparent gesture toward equality and liberation can be but an empty gesture that covertly sustains the hierarchies it purports to dismantle. Brown concludes with a proposed solution that amounts to engaging rhetorical projects by “tracking the work of tolerance in iterating subordination and marginalization, in part by functioning as a supplement to other elements of liberal discourse, such as universalism and egalitarianism, that are associated with remedying subordination and marginalization” (204–205). The solution is not only to trace the operations of tolerance discourse, but also to introduce new discourses: “We can attempt to strengthen articulations of inequality, abjection, subordination, and colonial and postcolonial violence that are suppressed by tolerance discourse” (205).

One of Brown’s best contributions is that she has provided an excellent example of a refreshingly “materialist” analysis of discourse. Tracing the trope of tolerance across disparate discursive territories enables Brown to pay considerable attention to questions of function, dissemination, and circulation. In addition to the attractions of her methodology, many of the themes she takes up are at the heart of contemporary discussions in communication: for instance, her considerations of the demise of the public sphere, the role of commemorative sites and the function of the visual in public memory, and the changing rhetorical landscape after 9/11 are likely to be of interest to a range of scholars in the field. The only potential shortcoming is that Brown is too wedded to a “dominant ideology” critique that simply unveils covert mechanisms of power without offering concrete alternatives to the bleak situation she posits. Tolerance is effectively repudiated as an “empowering” discourse but aside from the standard concluding pleas to fight postcolonialism, marginalization, subordination, and the like, Brown leaves us with little hope of a better world.

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