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Divas, Evil Black Bitches, and Bitter Black Women

*AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN POSTFEMINIST AND
POST-CIVIL-RIGHTS POPULAR CULTURE*

Much of feminist theory recognizes the contributions of women of color, particularly 1980s and 1990s demands for attention to intersectionality as fundamental to social, political, economic, and cultural transformation. To date, studies of postfeminism have studiously noted that many of its icons are white and cited the absence of women of color, but the analysis seems to stop there. Whiteness studies, a field that started with such a bang, appears to have dwindled to a whimper when it comes to thinking about how, say, Miranda, Carrie, Samantha, and Charlotte exact racial privilege while they have their sex in the city. The arrival of postfeminist discourse in popular culture, especially, needs to be interrogated about how race is always present. Even when they are not on the screen, women of color are present as the counterpart against which white women's ways of being—from Bridget Jones to Ally McBeal to Carrie Bradshaw—are defined and refined. Although there are black women in successful business, intellectual, and cultural industries, there are also, critically, not so new manifestations of racism and sexism impacting black women in popular culture.

This essay attempts to examine both African American women's presence and absence in postfeminist manifestations of popular culture. Some critics believe that we must expand campaigns for representational inclusivity to address underlying industrial practices, particularly given the expansion of culture industries from nationally owned entities (e.g., the Big Three networks, ABC, NBC, and CBS) into the global market (e.g., Viacom, NewsCorp, and Vivendi).¹ Undoubtedly the ability of business to capitalize on niche markets continues to evolve beyond American borders. Susan J. Douglas draws our attention to the political stakes of postfeminist culture, noting that "the seemingly most banal or innocent or peripheral media fare play a central, crucial role in the weekly and monthly engineering of consent around an acceptance of postfeminism as the only possible subjective stand and political position for women to inhabit in the early twenty-first century."² Seemingly harmless cultural representations of black women are incorporated into institutional enactments of discrimination, including racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist social policies. My analysis situates postfeminist and post-civil-rights discourses as retrograde and contrary to the interests of women in general and black women specifically. The potential political implications of these two discourses for popular culture pick up where misogynistic and racist stereotypes, often now implicit, left off, taking them to a new level of identity construction.

Integrating Multiple "Post-" Positions: Postfeminism and Post-Civil Rights

Examinations of postfeminism have defined it as a cultural and political move against feminism and contrary to the goals of the women's movement.³ It is also emerging that postfeminism includes claims of feminism's demise and accusations that feminism is antisex.⁴ Based on content analysis of ninety popular and academic sources, Elaine J. Hall and Marnie Salupo Rodriguez established the following four claims as central to postfeminism: support for feminism decreased from 1980 to 1990; antifeminism has increased among young women, women of color, and full-time homemakers; feminism is irrelevant because it has successfully achieved equality for young women, who feel they experience only personal, not institutional, sexism; and women who agree with feminist ideals of equality may refuse to claim a feminist identity.⁵ They then surveyed public opinion polls to test these claims, finding

that: levels of support increased or remained stable from the late 1980s to the early 1990s; women of color and young adults view the women's movement favorably while homemakers did appear disinclined toward feminism; from 1980 to 1999, half of their respondents considered the women's movement still relevant; and the "I'm not a feminist but . . ." position was prevalent, with the potential to depoliticize feminism.⁶

These findings and emerging definitions indicate, more generally, a backlash against the gains and goals of feminism defined broadly as solely rooted in a liberal, pluralist, feminist framework of equality. Amber Kinser, in her exploration of third-wave feminism, observes that today's young women live in a world where, curiously, "feminist *language* is part of the public dialogue, but authentic feminist *struggles* are not accounted for in that dialogue except in terms articulated by the mainstream, which still perpetuates a conservative and sexist status quo."⁷ This distinction between language and struggle is crucial because it is this difference that allows postfeminism, perhaps more insidiously than antifeminism, to appropriate feminist language and exploit liberal feminism's key weakness, namely, a call for equality without including racial analysis. Liberal feminism and postfeminism exclude revolutionary visions of feminism that continue to ask the question "equal to what?" Feminists of color long maintained that being equal to men of color, who experience disproportionate incarceration compared to white men, more unemployment, and so on, would mean merely a different kind of oppression. Why would women choose this capitalist fantasy of equality when the reality includes further gender segregation in the burgeoning American service economy, the rapid rise of women of color as incarcerated labor, and the closing of the welfare state? Instead, they argue that feminism needs to fight for radical social transformation, particularly in the United States, where equality discourse is rooted in a founding national document crafted by slaveholders and begins with the words "all [white] men are created equal."

It is on this basis that I would expose postfeminism's racial agenda. Postfeminism seeks to erase any progress toward racial inclusion that feminism has made since the 1980s. It does so by making racial difference, like feminism itself, merely another commodity for consumption. Amber Kinser remarks, "Part of the genius of postfeminism is to co-opt the language of feminism and then attach it to some kind of consumer behavior that feeds young people's hunger for uniqueness."⁸ Similarly, postfeminism takes de-

mands for racial inclusion on the feminist agenda and makes race consumable in the form of “ethnic” clothing, mainstreaming the fetishization of a “big, black booty,” promoting year-round “bronzed” (brown) skin, and encouraging consumption of fair trade goods without questioning the conflation of commerce and democracy. Racialized postfeminism does not move very far from bell hooks’s assertion that particular forms of cultural engagement merely amount to “eating the other”: a “commodification of otherness” in which “ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.”⁹

As Imelda Whelehan notes, control became a catchphrase of one 1990s manifestation of postfeminism, power feminism, but this control “always seemed to be about the right to consume and display oneself to best effect, not about empowerment in the worlds of work, politics, or even the home.”¹⁰ Women could once again be universalized under the assumption that they all want to “have it all.” If, as Diane Negra maintains, “One of the key premises in current antifeminist postfeminist constructions of women’s life choices . . . is the need to abandon the overly-ambitious 1980s program of ‘having it all,’” does this apply across racial categories?¹¹ The discourse of having it all has always been a bit lost on black women and anathema to black feminism, which aimed, in the 1970s, to dismantle the idea that black women could be superwomen. The icon of the black superwoman or strongblackwoman is not the racialized equivalent of having it all.¹² Having it all discourse implies that women are lacking something that they need to go out and get: career and family. Superwoman/strongblackwoman discourse assumes that a black woman has *too many obligations* but she is expected to *handle her business*. Thus, while postfeminism proposes that white women cannot have it all, racialized postfeminism, at least for black women, means continuing to be everything for everyone else *and* maintaining a sense of self. Postfeminism, though, has begun to assimilate black women into the rhetoric of having it all. For instance, Veronica Chambers’s *Having It All? Black Women and Success* accepts the terms of the having it all conceptualization and reflects a postfeminist vision of middle-class and aspiring upper-class black women’s lives. This vision treads a perilous line of a depoliticized *black* postfeminism, calling on black feminist theorists such as bell hooks and incorporating paragons of white beauty such as Audrey Hepburn and Grace Kelly. While I am not implying that black women can only look to black women for inspiration, the reliance

on staple icons such as Kelly and Hepburn does not advance black feminist calls, and feminist calls generally, for seeking out role models that do not fit into postfeminism's version of white, upper-class, slim, and traditionally attractive femininity.

In addition to postfeminism, there is another "post" to be reckoned with in this essay: post-civil rights. As part of a racialized discourse, one must grapple with postfeminism's place in the post-civil-rights era. Like critiques that expose the postfeminist fallacy that all of feminism's goals have been achieved, therefore rendering the women's movement unnecessary, post-civil-rights language would seem to imply that the goals of the civil rights movement were achieved starting with the Supreme Court desegregation legislation in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), extending through the passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964), and ending with the rise of a significant black middle class in the 1980s. However, it is more accurate to conceptualize post-civil-rights discourse as a commentary on the drastic rollbacks, or, to be consistent with criticisms of postfeminism, backlash, against the achievements of the civil rights movement. Patricia Hill Collins outlines the contours of that backlash against efforts to dismantle institutional racism: "In the 1980s, Republican administrations set about dismantling enforcement efforts for equal opportunity, cutting funding for urban programs, incarcerating growing numbers of African Americans in the burgeoning prison industry, shrinking the social welfare budget through punitive measures, and endorsing historical labor market patterns."¹³ The Clinton administration's dismantling of the welfare system, shifting from Aid to Families with Dependent Children to state-administered welfare-to-work programs, and the second Bush administration's aggressive stance against affirmative action fall well within the definition of a countermovement to a progressive agenda of racial equality.

The social counterpart to institutional post-civil-rights racism was the welfare queen. Poor black women were vilified as mammies and jezebels under slavery and again in the 1970s as matriarchs destroying the black community with their female-headed households and playing the welfare system for undue gain.¹⁴ The 1980s welfare queen image implied that black women not only cheated the system but also lived extravagantly on the proceeds. Integrally tied to reproduction, the welfare queen's trump card lay in her alleged disregard for birth control and propensity for having more children than she could afford. In its most perverse transformation yet, racist ideology main-

tained that, while white slave masters no longer profited from black women's offspring, black women now claimed public tax dollars for their profligacy. The incongruity of a black woman living the high life in some of the worst public housing in the world was lost on fiscally conservative American taxpayers. Welfare queen iconography remained solidly prevalent until the Clinton administration ended additional benefits for additional children. While it was not completely eradicated, the image of the welfare queen morphed into that of the crack-addicted mother, who became a mainstay of late 1980s and 1990s political rhetoric linking race and gender to the war on drugs.

Black women, the subject of racially gendered prejudices from the antebellum period through the 1980s, faced the iconography of the mammy, the jezebel, the sapphire, the matriarch, the welfare queen, and the crack-addicted mother in popular culture and social policy. As I have indicated, these stereotypes still exist, but they have also morphed into new ones more appropriate to the postfeminist, post-civil-rights era. If we are beyond discriminatory behavior, how do we account for the diva, black lady, and angry black woman images that populate the current cultural landscape?

The remainder of this essay explores representations of black women in selected television programs and films. The range of texts discussed here is by no means comprehensive, but it is meant to provide a general theory of black femininity within postfeminist and post-civil-rights discourses and illustrate examples of backlash representation.¹⁵ Starting with popular culture more generally, I tackle the usage of the term *diva* as it relates to black women and consider what it has come to signify about "black women with attitude." I also note Patricia Hill Collins's theorizing on the black lady and modern mammy images in popular culture representations. Both in political life and on television, the modern mammy and black lady maintain a striking convergence whether found in the White House or on our television screens. Next I analyze reality television's often *unreal* depictions of black women and responses to these sexist and racist evocations of black womanhood. Finally, I examine postfeminism and films of the post-civil-rights era about black women and their contradictory messages about black women's race, gender, and class. *Waiting to Exhale* (1995), *Down in the Delta* (1998), and *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005) offer fruitful areas of inquiry for locating postfeminism's racialized agenda.

Deploy the Diva!

Much like other stereotypes bestowed on African American women, the journey of the appellation *diva* is undertheorized and begs the question of how the term changed from denoting a heralded opera singer to its late-twentieth-century embodiment: a powerful and entertaining, if pushy and bitchy, woman. In thinking about how a label once applied to Maria Callas is now applied to Mariah Carey, we need to ask how the diva fits into the postfeminist, post-civil-rights agenda.

The association of the diva with singers has continued but recently changed genres. Hypothetically speaking, it is possible that a film facilitated the term's crossover from opera to R & B to hip hop. The French film *Diva* (1981) is structured around a twisting plot that was meant as a tribute to the French New Wave. The diva in question is Cynthia Hawkins (Wilhemina Wiggins-Fernandez), a reclusive black American opera singer who refuses to be recorded. A fan records one of her performances, setting off a stylized thriller with a number of interested parties all chasing after the same bootleg tape for various reasons—from adoration to criminal intent. For a generation of college-attending third-wave feminists, women and men, the film is a cult classic, with the diva, even as a recluse, driving the film's action.

If we also consider the career of another soprano, we can begin to make the leap from the black opera singer to the black R & B singer. Diana Ross was preceded by a number of talented black women singers who commanded respect in their own ways, but it was Ross who owned the 1960s and 1970s with her music and films. Topping the charts with the Supremes, she was an integral part of the distinct Motown sound. Although there were three group members, who all signed with Motown in 1961, in 1964 the record label head, Berry Gordy, designated Ross the permanent lead singer of the group—a move that generated ten number-one hit singles, making the Supremes the most successful black group of the 1960s. Notably, in 1967 the group was renamed Diana Ross and the Supremes, highlighting Ross's central role and creating tensions in the group that are still commented on whenever there is talk of a reunion.

Ross left the Supremes behind and embarked on a solo singing career in 1970. It got off to a rough start until Gordy and Motown's new film production unit showcased Ross as Billie Holiday in *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972). This

garnered Ross an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress, and she won a Golden Globe award for Best Newcomer. With this new cachet and a stunning soundtrack of Billie Holiday cover songs behind her, Ross received another Oscar nomination for her glamorous role as a poor project girl turned supermodel in *Mabogany* (1975). It is no wonder that she ended the decade with a critically acclaimed 1979 album appropriately titled *The Boss*.

I highlight Ross as the focus of the transition of the term *diva* from opera to R & B because in her life (at least the media-generated one), her music, and her films she became the template for contemporary notions of the diva as immensely talented but selfishly driven and difficult to deal with. It is hard to separate legend from fact, but with her ascension from group singer to lead singer in the Supremes and the larger than life aspects of her film roles it is nearly impossible to tell the difference between Diana and the Diva. Then and now, although she is still considered the Boss and a diva, her reported behavior demonstrates the dual nature of divadom. She inappropriately touched the rapper Lil' Kim's already exposed breast at the 1999 MTV Video Music Awards. At London Heathrow Airport, she vehemently opposed an airport body search she found intrusive by grabbing the security guard's breast. Convicted for drunk driving in 2004, Ross served only a fraction of her time because it was alleged that a guard let her have the run of the prison. Her later antics only fueled her reputation as a diva and facilitated the continued (d)evolution of the term.

Just as the diva label is bestowed, women and some gay men claim to be divas as an honorific. A 2002 review of *Cry*, an album by the country artist Faith Hill, in *Time* magazine opined, "By definition, a diva is a rampaging female ego redeemed only in part by a lovely voice. It's hard to imagine why anyone would want to be one, but a new generation of female talent appears to be weirdly enamored of the word and the idea."¹⁶ And, indeed, this was true when the adult video music channel VH1 launched its series of *Divas* concerts in 1999. Linking high glamour and a revue format to a charitable cause, VH1 capitalized, if not spearheaded, the latest incarnation of the cult of celebrity by designating new divas for each show. The first concert, *Divas Live*, featured Celine Dion (the romantic diva), Gloria Estefan (the Latina diva), Shania Twain (the pop-country diva), Mariah Carey (the R & B diva), Aretha Franklin (the truly talented diva), and special guest Carole King (the singer-songwriter diva).

Each successive *Divas* concert has followed this generational pattern: lesser-talented diva wannabes supported by genuinely talented, older women who have both style *and* substance. One might argue that truly talented women do not need pop culture entities such as VH1 to certify their abilities, nor do they feel the need to proclaim their greatness. This distinction and that between generations is evident in the number of older female singers who decline the diva label. The Motown hit maker and singer Gladys Knight insisted, “Don’t call me diva. Diva has become something else now. Now they’re throwing the word around. It’s supposed to mean some kind of grandeur and that kind of stuff, but some of these people who they call divas have not been here long enough anyway. No, don’t call me diva. I’m just here to sing. . . . I am not all that. And when I start thinking that it’s me, then I get into trouble. It’s not about me.”¹⁷

In a post-civil-rights and postfeminist context, the diva label would appear to be a dubious homage. Today’s divas are unreasonable, unpredictable, and likely unhinged. When a woman is called a diva or accused of exhibiting diva behavior, she is usually a woman of color. Jennifer Lopez’s extravagant on-set demands; Mariah Carey’s highly publicized, if disputed, nervous breakdown; Mary J. Blige’s early reputation as a drink- and drugs-fuelled hellion; Whitney Houston’s erratic behavior in private and in an interview with ABC’s Diane Sawyer; constant attempts to compare the contemporary pop group Destiny’s Child (especially the group’s early lineup upheavals) with the Supremes, including casting Beyoncé Knowles in the film version (2006) of the Broadway tribute to Diana Ross and the Supremes, *Dreamgirls*—these incidents are regularly featured in celebrity news venues as evidence of a woman whose financial success has yielded excess. Clearly, the line of postfeminist reasoning would go, these women do not know how to be humble about their talents and use them in the service of others. While a tug-of-war over the empowering or negative connotations of divadom might be fought, it seems the label is ultimately just another form of categorization that classes women according to how well they adhere to race, class, and sexuality norms.

Black Ladies and Modern Mammies

In an “In Focus” section of *Cinema Journal*, Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra observe, “Within contemporary popular culture, it is clear that certain kinds of female agency are recognizably and profitably packaged as commodities.

Typically, texts of this form are directed at a female audience even while covertly acknowledging male viewers/voyeurs.”¹⁸ They go on to note the ways in which postfeminism operates on the basis of inclusion and exclusion, all the while assuming gender equality that allows for politically decontextualized racial and ethnic diversity. Much like early feminist generalizations, postfeminism assumes a universal category of women—or so it would seem. I maintain, however, that popular culture narrowcasts its representations of women to appeal to audience segments. In other words, racial and gender stereotypes are the commodity and discourse that make difference legible in popular culture.

The image of the angry black woman has always been present on television, particularly in the form of a mouthy harpy. Media critics and African American historians duly note the image of the nurturing mammy, the loud-mouthed Sapphire, and the oversexed Jezebel as staples of television genres from situation comedies to family dramas to comedy sketch programs.¹⁹ Thus, reality TV adopted this stereotype rather than originating it. In the post-civil-rights era, and with the rise of a black middle class, Collins believes we now have cultural representations and stereotypes of black women stratified by class. If poor and working-class women are defined as bitchy, promiscuous, and overly fertile, these “controlling images . . . become texts of what *not* to be.”²⁰

Becoming middle class, then, relies on a politics of respectability.²¹ Echoing ancestral mandates passed down from the nineteenth century, black professional women must adhere to the role of the black lady, a role designed to counter accusations of black female licentiousness and one that can accommodate the ascension to middle-class status through work outside the home. Since black women were, and continue to be, necessary to the workforce, postfeminist representations make it clear that “they cannot achieve the status of lady by withdrawing from the workforce” like white women.²² An enduring example of the black lady is Clair Huxtable, the upper-middle-class wife, mother, daughter, and lawyer of the most successful post-civil-rights black television show, the *Cosby Show* (1984–92). As she was never shown at work like her husband, Heathcliff, Clair’s skills as a lawyer usually only emerged in her approach to mediating her children’s squabbles. In an effort to maintain the black lady’s status, Collins claims, “the image of Mammy, the loyal female servant created under chattel slavery, has been resurrected and modernized

as a template for middle-class Black womanhood. Maneuvering through this image of the modern mammy requires a delicate balance between being appropriately subordinate to White and/or male authority yet maintaining a level of ambition and aggressiveness needed for achievement in middle-class occupations.”²³

George Walker Bush’s secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, is the real life example of the black lady. Disavowing affirmative action, claiming success solely based on merit, and determinedly asexual, Rice epitomizes the black professional lady at the height of her success. As the highest-ranking African American woman ever to serve in a presidential administration, Rice attempts to, paradoxically, depoliticize her presence there as a political actor. Narratives of her Birmingham, Alabama, childhood and current success are consistently separated from the struggle for civil rights. She insists on a personal and family history of self-reliance but denies privileges derived from black liberation struggles that accrued to a small but emerging black middle class long before the Cosbys.

Rice embodies postfeminist and post-civil-rights discourses in her adamant adherence to the conservative Republican Party values of individual achievement and empowerment through money. To date, one of the most revealing and extensive articles on her attitudes appeared in the 9 September 2001 issue of the *Washington Post Magazine*. In the article, Rice is reported to have said that in her family “liberation came not through a movement but from generations of ancestors navigating oppression with individual will, wits and, eventually, wallets—long before King or the federal government took up the cause. It is one of her frustrations,” the article continues, “that people routinely assume she was beaten down or deprived as a child until the civil rights movement arrived. ‘My family is third-generation college-educated,’ she says with proud defiance. ‘I should’ve gotten to where I am.’”²⁴ In Rice’s logic, those who are part of America’s underclass are undeserving, but her achievements are based solely on merit. Hers is a post-civil-rights mentality conditioned by defensiveness against affirmative action and rewarded for maintaining the privileges of the meritocracy.

As a high-ranking woman, Rice’s sexuality has also fallen under scrutiny. In the modern mammy role, it is assumed that Rice is asexual, as would be appropriate for a woman of her rank in a presidential administration. Neither the mammy nor the black lady are thought of as sexual or having sex, but

Rice poses a conflicted dilemma for leftists who pride themselves on their antiracism and antisexism. Previously advocating positions that argue against assumptions about black women's sexuality as licentious, supposedly progressive activists and thinkers will not hesitate to make unseemly comments about Rice's sexuality. Just as Anita Hill's single status and sexual harassment claims against Clarence Thomas were pathologized as "erotomania," speculation about Rice ranges from accusations of lesbianism to innuendo that she has an intimate relationship with George W. Bush. In November 2004, the British newspaper the *Guardian* made these observations.

As national security adviser for four years, Ms Rice has been indispensable and constantly available. She has no other life, has never married and a handful of dates with eligible men organised by well-meaning friends have led nowhere romantically.

She spends many of her weekends at Camp David with the president, watching baseball and football and doing jigsaws with the first family. Her only time off appears to be occasional sessions playing the piano with a classical music group in Washington.

At a dinner party with some senior journalists in spring this year, her dedication was revealed in an extraordinary Freudian slip. "As I was telling my husband—" she blurted, before correcting herself. "As I was telling President Bush."

It says a lot about the prim reputation of both that hardly anyone in gossip-ridden Washington interpreted the slip as a sign of a romantic connection.

The Washington newspapers and blogs may have steered clear of interpreting Rice's slip of the tongue, but black liberal news sources ran with it. The Web site BlackCommentator.com was already deriding Rice as "The Borg Queen" and ran a controversial cartoon in 2003 that implied that she, in addition to being a gatekeeper, might have a more intimate relationship with the president.

The most notable black liberal ire toward Rice was exhibited in a series of cartoons by Aaron McGruder that ran in November 2004. The strip in essence contends that perhaps if Rice got some "good old fashioned lovin'" she would not be "hell-bent" on destroying the world. Possible suitors in-

cluded Darth Vader as the one man in the universe who Rice might find compatible.

It is noteworthy that black men generated both depictions of Rice; black women academics and activists have been notably silent about her. Their views echo those in e-mail discussion groups and blogs contending that Rice, like Clarence Thomas, is a sell-out to African Americans. Interestingly, though, it is somehow considered just to raise Rice's sexuality as a rationale for her conservative politics. She either simply needs to get laid or, because she is an unmarried, successful woman in highly male echelons, she is a lesbian. In this postfeminist, post-civil-rights era, Rice is in a no-win situation: in the eyes of conservatives, she is totally devoid of sexuality, as a black lady should be; to liberals, she is a modern mammy (i.e., a race traitor à la Sally Hemings, an unfortunate spinster, or a lesbian).

Rice poses a dilemma in that her achievements are consistently linked to a conservative agenda for which she appears to be but a prop. Indeed, her position in the most powerful government in the world is impressive, particularly as she grew up in the midst of racist violence. And yet, when contextualized in the prevalent stereotypes of the day, it is difficult, if nearly impossible, to view Rice as a success of the feminist and civil rights movements. And she would not want that. Instead, she embraces ideologies that claim the end of racism and sexism. While she may not want to be a representative of black achievement, she enables postfeminist and post-civil-rights agendas by serving as both the good black lady and the modern mammy.

Collins cites *Law and Order's* police lieutenant, Anita Van Buren, and *The District's* Ella Farmer as examples of television characters that, while respectable, cannot evade the strictures of the modern mammy and the black lady. They may face sexist and racist discrimination, but "they both remain loyal to social institutions of law and order that are run by White men."²⁵ The same assertion is one possible explanation for the ubiquity of black female judges in television crime dramas. Failing to accurately represent the number of black women in the legal profession or the disproportionate rise in the number of black female inmates, and perhaps fearful of accusations of racism, black lady judges are preferable to 1970s and 1980s representations of black women as prostitutes or drug addicts in television courtrooms.²⁶

The Editing Made Me Do It! The Evil Black Woman

If you've ever seen a reality TV show, chances are you've seen her: a perpetually perturbed tooth-sucking, eye-rolling, finger-wagging harpy, creating confrontations in her wake and perceiving racial slights from the flimsiest provocations. At the very sight of her, her cast mates tremble in fear. And no wonder. She's the Sista With an Attitude.²⁷

Reality TV "is a catch-all term, a convenient shorthand for many kinds of television."²⁸ This genre, borrowing the situationist approach from psychology and applying it to television ("what would happen if . . . ?"), includes programs that film people in everyday situations, in unusual situations, in game show competitions, on talk shows, and in docusoaps. What all these formats have in common is "the comprehensive monitoring of the unscripted rhythms of daily life" for both advertiser and audience consumption.²⁹ And just as reality TV is a catchall, its modes of operation, including casting, are a catchall for socially constructed identities.

Media critics, reality television aficionados, producers, and especially participants in the genre all acknowledge the stock trade in two-dimensional representation. Reality TV shows are not far removed from unsupervised social psychology experiments that create controlled environments using identity as mere prop.³⁰ Writing for the *Washington Post*, in an article entitled "The Evil Sista of Reality Television" Teresa Wiltz notes the use of "recognizable stereotypes" as "visual shorthand" in the genre.³¹ In "Race and Reality . . . TV," the media critic L. S. Kim observes that, while there may be more "characters" of color than ever before on television due to the reality genre, editing creates "characters in what can best be described as an 'ensemble cast.'"³² Omarosa Manigault-Stallworth explains, "Minorities have historically been portrayed negatively on reality TV. . . . These types of show thrive off of portrayals that tap into preconceived stereotypes about minorities (i.e. that we are lazy, dishonest and hostile). Reality TV's 'angry black woman' portrayal strikes again!"³³

And Manigault-Stallworth should know. In 2004, she became the most infamous black woman on television. For viewers of Donald Trump's reality series *The Apprentice*, Manigault-Stallworth epitomized the angry black woman, the evil black bitch, and every other variation on that particular racist

and sexist theme. During her tenure on the show in its first season, and after she was “fired” as a Trump apprentice, she was (and continues to be) vilified as difficult, lazy, obstructive, manipulative, and unnecessarily hostile to her fellow contestants.

Commensurate with Collins’s update of stereotypes of black womanhood, in unscripted programming Manigault-Stallworth fell afoul of scripts for black female behavior. She was *The Apprentice*’s antiblack lady. She failed to be the modern mammy. She “played the race card” when she took offense at another cast member telling her “that’s calling the kettle black.” She was less than nurturing to other women on the show. She appeared to intentionally sabotage the efforts of the other African American, Kwame Jackson, participating in the show. Although Jackson came in as runner-up at the end of the competition, Manigault-Stallworth’s actions played into divisive perceptions of a black woman trying to hold a black man back. She even beat out Paris Hilton for the title “Most Appalling Reality Show Star of the 2003–2004 Season.”³⁴

Trump offered contradictory assessments of Manigault-Stallworth. On the show, he berated her: “You were rude. You *are* rude. I’ve seen it. . . . It was very repulsive to me.”³⁵ Yet, in an interview with the infotainment program *Extra*, Trump was bewildered, stating, “Omarosa is very smart. She’s very beautiful, and she’s got an attitude and some of the women have gotten to just hate her. The level of hatred for Omarosa is so unbelievable that I’ve never seen anything like it.”³⁶ Manigault-Stallworth confounded reality tv’s visual codes for women in general and for black women specifically. She’s beautiful, but beautiful women are supposed to be dumb. For a man, a take-no-prisoners attitude in business would usually be just the thing he needs to succeed in the cutthroat corporate world, but a black woman with attitude has no place in Trump’s or any other white-dominated institution. Both her supposed attitude and her uncompromising nature canceled out any black lady or modern mammy roles she might have assumed.

Manigault-Stallworth held her own during an appearance on *Dr. Phil*.³⁷ Dr. Phil McGraw, a clinical psychologist, met Oprah Winfrey while running a business that focused on providing trial lawyers with psychological expertise for mock trials and jury selection. He soon became a regular fixture on *Oprah*, known for his straight-talking, Texan manner. With his catchphrase “Get real,” he launched his own advice talk show in 2002 and took on both

Manigault-Stallworth and Donald Trump in May 2005. During the broadcast, Manigault-Stallworth admitted to both playing to the cameras (“I quickly learned that as a black woman on reality television, if you want to get camera time, then you’ve got to be quite naughty. I knew that if I was naughty, I could certainly dominate most of the show, and I did. Guilty as charged!”) and being manipulated by the editing process (“The Omarosa that America saw is a character. Out of every three hundred minutes that they shot, there was only one minute that the American people saw. You don’t see the manipulation behind the scenes. You don’t see a systematic pattern of how they portray people. I am cast on these shows to be naughty.”). Dr. Phil accused her of complaining and being a victim, but Manigault-Stallworth characterized her experience as research and critical analysis. She readily accepted partial responsibility for her actions but only as the performance of a preexisting role. Her position is a conflicted one that is mired in “the pornography of the performing self.”³⁸ She raises objections to a double standard that paints her and other black women as liars and bitches, but white contestants as smart and shrewd. Yet her concerns are less tailored toward fair representation than they are focused on how those projections impact her fiscal bottom line.

Audiences and critics are attuned to producers’ and show participants’ motivations, but that does not make them more accepting of the prejudices perpetuated. After a week of racist slights — from the overt to the covert — a student press writer, Melanie Sims, in a review of reality TV imagines she is being stalked by television producers with hidden cameras intent on catching her out “finger-wagging, neck-popping, eye-rolling, [and] disgruntled.”³⁹ She refuses to play this role, saying, “The EBW [evil black woman] is a persona — not a person. For as much as she is respected, she is vilified. She represents only a fraction of the black female consciousness and even less of the black female population as a whole. Reality TV’s angry black woman is merely a product of selective studio editing.”⁴⁰

But how much can we blame on the editing? Camille McDonald, a contestant in series two of *America’s Next Top Model*, claimed that her perceived arrogance, petulance, discord with other contestants, and rudeness was “a media created, or media infused personality due to editing.”⁴¹ This disclaimer has become a standard one regardless of identity for reality TV show participants and might be evidence of a widespread postmodern sensibility about constructions of truth and reality. To blame the editing avoids directly accusing

television producers of manipulation, absolves reality TV show participants of accountability for their actions, and keeps them in the good graces of producers, who might want to use them in yet another reality TV series.

Yet, in a moment of candor, McDonald admits, “It’s a reality show, so I can’t sit here and say that we were given characters. Nothing was scripted. Everyone said what they said and did what they did, but it was how it was put together in the editing. You also have to keep in mind that there are other people besides Tyra [Banks, series producer and supermodel] who have a say in how the contestants are portrayed. The bottom line for them is that if it doesn’t make dollars it doesn’t make sense.” McDonald and other reality TV participants pretend to do the public a favor by cluing them in to what audiences already know: that even a genre claiming to be unscripted and true plays tricks and manipulates sound and image to craft a saleable product. It is an open secret that reality TV participants are also culpable since they, too, are concerned about the bottom line: future fame and fortune in a celebrity-fueled, “famous for being famous” culture.

Blaming the editing also allows reality TV participants to explain their consent to misrepresentation. In reality TV logic, a signed consent form assumes that participants are fully informed; thus, Manigault-Stallworth and McDonald implicitly agreed to negative representations of black women. Jennifer Pozner, the executive director of Women in Media and News, writes, “Apologists claim reality TV isn’t sexist because no one forces women to appear on these shows.”⁴² Male rap music video directors and artists use the same rationale to dismiss accusations that they exploit women, making them just another part of the scenery like cars and money. Although audiences are often treated to the hard luck stories of reality TV participants (particularly for the eighteen to twenty-four age demographic there is often an assumed narrative of absent fathers and single mothers incapable of providing for their children), it is more difficult to refute the claim of agency denied for reality TV contestants than it is for women in rap videos. Whereas there are clear financial benefits in rap video performance, lap dancing, and other related industries that surpass working in the American service economy, the incentives for black women and men to play to type are more dubious in reality television.⁴³

Brenton and Cohen contest the idea of consent in reality TV environments that are often structured, with the help of staff psychologists, around a dis-

orienting audition process, manipulation of feelings of guilt, appeals to competitive spirit, and a sense of responsibility to see a given task through to its end. Consent, then, is a deeper issue than the mere act of a participant signing up for an experience might suggest. Consent also raises ethical questions for psychologists and legal and intellectual property issues for producers.⁴⁴ Manipulating consent, as well as reality TV participants' sense of having consented, is integral to the genre's structure and the manipulation of audiences' gender, race, class, and sexual orientation prejudices.

Although audiences have yet to see the evil black woman, or her counterpart the angry black man, win a reality TV competition, blacks have progressed through these competitions, but at what cost? For contestants across race, Kim defines the following criteria as integral to winning: a show of gratitude ("A Successful or compelling player must be grateful for the text, e.g. by praising and thanking the show [or God] for the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see his/her dream come true"); and a sympathetic backstory ("S/he must have a good pre-existing story, one that follows a Horatio Alger and/or immigrant tale," e.g., *American Idol* winner Ruben Studdard lived in a car with his single mother); and a good work ethic ("American viewers must see these people exerting energy and emotion in order to be worthy of becoming the winner or hero of a reality television text").⁴⁵ The stock characters that cater to audiences' prejudices benefit from what Jon Dovey calls reality TV's "regime of truth . . . the foregrounding of individual subjective experience at the expense of more general truth claims."⁴⁶

Crucially, reality TV participants benefit from this regime of truth only to the extent that they adhere to dominant ideas about race, class, gender, sexuality, and physical ability. Thus, Studdard's sympathetic backstory is authenticated because of dominant assumptions about black single mothers as incapable of providing for their children. However, when it comes to racism and sexism, subjective experience is usually discounted as paranoia and outside the regime of truth. When confident black women such as McDonald and Manigault-Stallworth, refusing to conform to these criteria, as well as rejecting historical perceptions of black women as only existing to make white lives better, do appear in reality TV competitions, not only do they lose but they also end up maligned. Camille, a student at Howard University (a historically black school), characterizes her toughness and high self-regard as honoring her parents' sacrifice as immigrants from the Caribbean and refuses

to apologize for her pride: “People have asked me ‘why didn’t you cry [when you were eliminated]? You’re so cold; so distant. You have no emotions.’ But I’m like ‘cry fi wah?’ If I was to cry my grandmother would be like ‘yuh wan mi gi yuh sup’m fi cry about?’ I have the entire West Indies riding on my back. If I make it, they make it.”⁴⁷ Her use of dialect in an interview following her *America’s Next Top Model* experience reflects a connection to heritage and values that did not make it into the show. As she notes, “The show portrayed my confidence as cockiness.”⁴⁸ Camille, like other people of color raised similarly, is the product of parents who raised their children to hold their heads high in the midst of racism and to persevere in spite of efforts to hold them back. Reality TV cannot accommodate black women who do not fit the few sanctioned contemporary roles (e.g., the ubiquitous black woman judge, the abusive single mother, or the police captain without a capacity for significant action).

One must question black feminism’s progress in dismantling images of “the black bitch,” “the loud black woman,” “the sistah with attitude,” and a host of other stereotypes if these cues are still considered easily recognizable. There is also the notable failure of societal transformation in eradicating these images. A connected question asks whether we can hold black women who behave badly on reality TV accountable for perpetuating an image detrimental to black women. Do we just as readily recognize and remember the names of those who represented black women as kind, generous, and likable on reality TV?

Although we cannot assume that any of these women claim feminist politics, we can presume that they enter into the genre aware of black women’s construction in the popular imagination. Like the negative version of the barely talented diva, do reality TV women believe their own hype? Does the reality TV diva take ideas about black women’s strength to a perverse extreme, playing to those constructions to succeed at the audition stage? In a bid for celebrity or progress in their field, be it modeling, corporate enterprises, acting, sports, or any number of other professions that thrive on effective public relations, some black women in reality TV shows choose to manipulate retrograde prejudices about black womanhood. Some celebrities reject the idea that they are role models, and I am not claiming that black participants in reality TV should assume that role. However, no matter how much we adamantly maintain that no one black person should have to be representative of

the race, we need to be aware that television disseminates these representations nationally and internationally.

The question very rarely asked, though, is *why* these black women are so angry. The answer lies where postfeminism meets post-civil rights: both discourses erase history and claim equality as today's norm for women and people of color. Much like 1970s feminism's failure to recognize that black women were already "liberated" in the sense that they have always worked outside the home (if this was the meaning of liberation) since slavery, postfeminism situates black women as always already angry, carrying a chip on their collective shoulders and ready to go off at the least personal slight.

This provides the context for reality tv's evil black woman. Reverting to the days before feminism declared the personal as political, postfeminism retrenches women's grievances, especially those of black women, as personal—not structural or institutional. How, after all, can racism and sexism be built into the structure of unscripted television? By denying the fabricated nature and ensemble-cast character of reality tv, producers can recast their blatant use of racist, sexist, heterosexist, and classist iconography as creating an ensemble that represents one version of a diverse America. In the post-civil-rights vision of the world, inclusion means merely having a presence, not empowerment in terms of self-definition.⁴⁹

Bitter Black Women

It has been suggested that postfeminism "mask[s] the persistence of a sexual double standard, the persistence of racial stereotyping, and the persistence of efforts to re-domesticate women by insisting that their place, first and foremost, remains in the home and subservient to men."⁵⁰ Do these conditions apply to all women? After all, black women historically have rarely been in *their own homes* as full-time homemakers. Now, more than ever, black women are in the workforce. Chambers notes, "Between 1976 and 2006, the number of black women in the workplace will have increased by 35 percent. This is in comparison with white women, up by 10 percent in the same 30 years."⁵¹ Although black women are being displaced by other groups of women of color, particularly immigrant populations, they continue to earn advanced degrees at a rate faster than that of black men and "in some fields, such as sales and administrative support roles . . . black women are beginning to earn slightly more [than white women]."⁵² Given black women's presence and success in

the workplace, what does it mean for postfeminism to redomesticate them with the assistance of racial stereotyping and a sexual double standard?

Postfeminism's racialized narrative takes assumptions about white women's lives and turns them on their heads. Thus, the few films that deal with middle-class African American women, call for them to remain in the workplace but in racially prescribed ways. As was seen with Manigault-Stallworth, attempting to climb higher than one's racially prescribed station, exhibiting characteristics usually lauded in men, results in a violation of the modern mammy and black lady stereotypes. The post-civil-rights narrative in these films relies on the assumption that integration means assimilation and therefore a loss of culture. Presumptions in these films are based on problematic notions of racial authenticity. The story usually begins with a black couple that has worked its way up from poverty or the working class. The wife supported her husband through medical, law, or dental school or while he developed his business from a small enterprise to a large, successful corporation. The marker of the black man's success in this trope, in line with some 1970s black masculinist discourses, is a white or light-skinned black female secretary who inevitably becomes his lover. In the most callous way possible, the black man reveals to his black wife that he will shortly be moving his lover into their home and she should pack her things and go.

At this point, the story usually follows the postfeminist script of "retreatism." Analyzing a range of examples of films featuring white female protagonists, Negra concludes that "retreatism has become a recognizable narrative trope. Accordingly, both film and television have incorporated fantasies of hometown return in which a heroine gives up her life in the city to take up again the role of daughter, sister, wife or sweetheart in a hometown setting."⁵³ Films featuring black women protagonists also portray retreat, but filmmakers attempt to make their departure points and destinations seem racially authentic. The black female heroine goes in one of two directions: she either returns to her family and the black community that she has neglected or she turns to a tight network of sister-friends. In the case of *Waiting to Exhale* (1995), the husband of one of the four central protagonists leaves her for his white assistant, and she burns most of his expensive belongings in a fit of rage. She later calmly sells off the rest of his possessions in a yard sale. She turns to her friends for comfort and support, noting that she left her own dreams behind to support her now wealthy husband's ambitions. The 1998

film *Down in the Delta*, directed by Maya Angelou, finds a mother sending her two granddaughters and drug-addicted daughter away from Chicago to live with her brother in Mississippi. It is there that the prodigal daughter learns about ancestral struggles and her heritage—a connection with land and family that restores her self-esteem and facilitates her recovery from addiction. In a slight variation, in *Beauty Shop* (2005) Queen Latifah returns from the white world, specifically a high-end hair salon, to an urban neighborhood where she can own her own salon and hang a picture of the first black female millionaire, Madame C. J. Walker.

Postfeminism's retreatist narrative is in effect most clearly in *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005), a compelling film in the postfeminist, post-civil-rights era because of its production and narrative. The film is based on one of a series of Tyler Perry gospel stage plays. Other titles include *I Can Do Bad All by Myself* (2000), *Madea's Family Reunion* (2002), *Madea's Class Reunion* (2003), *Meet the Browns* (2004), and *Madea Goes to Jail* (2004). These typically play on the "chitlin'" or "urban theater circuit," a colloquialism for the mainly African American venues, such as nightclubs and theaters, that host the productions. The lucrative potential of these plays should not be underestimated; according to Perry, he grossed over 50 million dollars writing and producing plays for urban theaters.⁵⁴ *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* surprised the industry and critics—when it grossed over 22.7 million dollars and was the number one film on its opening weekend.

The mad black woman in question is Helen (Kimberly Elise), a woman who has always lived in the same city where she was raised—Atlanta—but she has moved to an affluent suburb with her husband Charles (Steve Harris) (fig. 1). Helen has emotionally and racially left home, though. In the presence of his light-skinned mistress—she will be moving into his home with her infant son, who he has clearly fathered—Charles literally throws his wife out of the house. The mover who rescues her will eventually become the love of her life, although Helen is angry and cast as "one of those bitter black women." Ashamed and disheveled, she returns home to her grandmother, Madea.⁵⁵ Helen exacts her revenge on her ex-husband by sadistically neglecting and humiliating him after he is paralyzed in an accident and his mistress, who has turned into another stereotype, the evil mulatto, abandons him.

It is only through the religious guidance of the church, her new lover's spiritual nurturance, and her pistol-packing Granny's wisecracks that Helen



Recent popular culture has generated a set of typologies of postfeminist black femininity. Helen in *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* is pictured here first as a supportive wife and then in a short-lived period of rage and vengefulness after her husband leaves her for a lighter-skinned woman. By the close, she will establish a new sense of self tied to a rejuvenated notion of community and a “coming back to blackness.”

once again learns to stand on her own two feet and knows that she can only rely on four men for sure: the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, and a good black man.

In *Waiting to Exhale*, *Down in the Delta*, and *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, each heroine has sacrificed her standing as a strongblackwoman, but the end of the film finds her redeemed. *Down in the Delta* uses drug abuse and urban living to mark a loss of self for its working-poor heroine that can only be regained by getting back in touch with her roots. For middle-class women, like those in *Waiting to Exhale* and *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, the retreat to family or sister-

friends is actually a coming back to blackness—the implication being that when a black female protagonist has it all she becomes a snob and is in danger of no longer being authentically black. Eventually, the middle-class heroine returns to a true sense of herself through an appropriately black, small business enterprise (e.g., a beauty shop or soul food restaurant), her family and friends’ nurturance, a good black man, and *always* a new haircut. Thus, the markers of change for these women are both stylistic changes of appearance and clearly marked as having to do with identity.

How do these films function in the postfeminist era in which they were produced? On the one hand, they can be characterized as black women’s films, an updating of the 1930s and 1940s woman’s film genre: black women suffer but are ultimately triumphant, having returned to a place from which they drifted, and black family and community are regained. This would seem to be a positive message for black women. Yet, within the context of postfeminist, post-civil-rights discourse, what are we to make of black women’s position in American society as suggested by the deployment of the diva, the race-inflected fiction of reality tv, and the black “chick flick”?

I propose that, for African American women, the postfeminist message is that black women need to know their place within the racial and gender hierarchy even if they are permitted, in small numbers, to assume places in the middle class. For the films discussed in this essay, when black women leave work and become homemakers they lose themselves and their connection to being black. Are black mainstream filmmakers and authors in a growing area of black chick lit and flicks advocating a feminist position that black middle-class women should remain in the world of work because without work they will lose their freedom? Or are they saying that black women are incapable of choosing to stay in the (opulent) home because it is considered lazy and indulgent and will make them soft—something black women are not allowed to be if they are to continue to uphold the race? The implication is that educational and career achievement is black women’s twenty-first-century racial uplift work.

Contemporary film and television representations of African American women offer two racially gendered variations of postfeminist discourse. In relation to white women, still to be defined as the other, black women continue to be denied access to the pedestal (in this case the option of not working) designated by nineteenth-century ideals as the sole province of white

women. Instead, black women are expected to remain in the workplace performing emotional, if not physical, labor for whites. Black women on reality tv, if they step away from the roles of the modern mammy or the black lady, clearly exceed their place as subservient to whites. Unless it is being mimicked or appropriated by white, mainstream popular culture (“You go, girl!”), any demonstration of pride or refusal to act like a black lady is characterized as being difficult or having an attitude.

In relationship to black men and black communities, post-civil-rights and postfeminist discourses require black women not to have it all but to continue to do it all. Black women’s agreement with feminist principles and continuing resistance to increased numbers of black women being incarcerated, sexual exploitation, and a host of other oppressive factors are erased because in the post-civil-rights worldview they are racial success stories.⁵⁶ Middle-class black women are marginally afforded status as women, or ladies more specifically, if they conform to a politics of respectability. If they do not conform, they are relegated to the evil black woman category along with poor and working-class black women.

Postfeminism, post-civil rights, postmodernism—linguistically all these “posts” might seem excessive and merely indulgent jargon. After all, how might a constant critique of backlash politics and culture limit visions for social transformation? To always be in the defensive position and reacting can sometimes leave little room or energy for thinking and behaving proactively. As feminist, critical race, and queer critics, the prospect that we will find ourselves only able to articulate everything that is wrong with popular culture and unable to give credit to those positive aspects that create a pathway to transformative visions is worrisome.⁵⁷ As feminists making incursions into the terrain of postfeminism, recognizing those culture makers forging ahead because of and in spite of oppression is as important, if not more important, than highlighting those forces counter to ending oppression. Yet, when forces determined to maintain the status quo use “post” formulations to attempt to make us believe we are beyond particular forms of oppression or liberation struggles, the work of critique continues.

To bring current Audre Lorde’s metaphor, the master’s house has not, in fact, been dismantled but instead has added additional rooms and annexes in which to harbor oppressive variations of racist, sexist, classist, and hetero-sexist themes. This move makes interrogating postfeminism and post-civil-

rights culture necessary. Critiques of these concepts make visible the political, social, and economic changes that shape discriminatory practices and our responses to them. As modes of exploitation change to continue to accommodate oppression, our critiques also need to adapt in language and practice, making “post” political configurations critical sites of analysis.

Notes

1. Herman Gray offers a compelling critique of continued media activism around representation and offers new directions for race and media studies, noting that we no longer live in a world in which media are controlled by local, state, or even national forces. Media activists concerned about racial representation, in his opinion, will need to look for the global implications of media production and distribution and how these impact representation. See Gray, *Cultural Moves*.
2. Douglas, “Manufacturing Postfeminism.”
3. Kinser, “Negotiating Spaces for/through Third-Wave Feminism,” 134–35.
4. Aronson, “Feminists or ‘Postfeminists’?”; Projansky, *Watching Rape*.
5. Hall and Rodriguez, “The Myth of Postfeminism,” 879.
6. *Ibid.*, 886–99.
7. Kinser, “Negotiating Spaces,” 135.
8. *Ibid.*, 144.
9. hooks, “Eating the Other.”
10. Whelehan, *Overloaded*, 4.
11. Negra, “Quality Postfeminism?”
12. Joan Morgan runs the words *strong*, *black*, and *woman* together to signify the entwining and seeming inextricability of these words in the lives of black women and expectations of them; see her *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*.
13. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 78–79.
14. See Moynihan, *The Negro Family*.
15. The idea of backlash, of course, assumes that there was momentary progress in the representations of black women before the backlash.
16. Tyrangiel, “The New Diva-Disease.”
17. “Gladys Knight Talks about ‘At Last,’ Her First Album in Six Years, and Why She’s Not a Diva.”
18. Tasker and Negra, “In Focus,” 108.
19. Gray, *Watching Race*; Smith-Shomade, *Shaded Lives*.
20. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 138–40.
21. Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*.
22. *Ibid.*, 139.
23. *Ibid.*, 140.
24. Russakoff, “Lessons of Might and Right.”
25. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 142.
26. Oprah Winfrey, Collins posits, is a successful reflection of the black lady and mod-

- ern mammy through her nurturance of predominately white female talk show guests and her avocations of personal, individualized transformation. Anita Hill, on the other hand, violates the tenets of black ladyhood and the modern mammy. Although she exhibited all the traits of respectability, once she accused the Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment she challenged the social order and was punished for it.
27. Wiltz, "The Evil Sista of Reality Television."
 28. Brenton and Cohen, *Shooting People*, 8.
 29. Andrejevic, *Reality TV*, 8.
 30. Brenton and Cohen (in *Shooting People*) cogently delineate the devolution from documentary film with social purpose to unsupervised psychology experiments (especially Philip Zimbardo's 1971 Stanford Prison experiment in which ordinary citizens took their roles as guards and prisoners to a psychologically damaging degree) and contemporary psychology professionals' dubious ethical relationships with reality tv productions as series contestants.
 31. Wiltz, "The Evil Sista of Reality Television."
 32. Kim, "Race and Reality . . . TV."
 33. Wiltz, "The Evil Sista of Reality Television."
 34. "The 2003–2004 Tubey Awards, Part Two," www.televisionwithoutpity.com.
 35. Wiltz, "The Evil Sista of Reality Television."
 36. Daniels, "Africana's Reality tv Recap."
 37. "Reality Check," *Dr. Phil*, www.drphil.com, May 2005.
 38. Brenton and Cohen, *Shooting People*, 53.
 39. Sims, "Angry Black Woman."
 40. Ibid.
 41. Butler, "Camille McDonald Dispels Rumors and Sets the Record Straight."
 42. Pozner, "The Unreal World."
 43. Thomas, "The Power of Women." Applicable to most reality tv shows is *The Apprentice*'s tagline: "This isn't a game. This is a thirteen-week job interview." Landing a job with Donald Trump on *The Apprentice*, a recording contract, speaking engagements on college campuses, or hosting *MTV's Spring Break* are all possibilities, but the fickle world of reality television does not promise a long and lucrative career.
 44. Brenton and Cohen, *Shooting People*, 135–44.
 45. Kim, "Race and Reality . . . TV."
 46. Dovey, *Freakshow*, 25.
 47. Butler, "Camille McDonald Dispels Rumors and Sets the Record Straight."
 48. Ibid.
 49. Tellingly, of the monographs on reality tv consulted for this essay, only one indexed *racism* and none indexed *race*, *whiteness*, or any other racial grouping. This indicates a failure of the literature, to date, to adequately grapple with race and its role in the genre.
 50. Douglas, "Manufacturing Postfeminism."
 51. Chambers, *Having It All?* 3.

52. Ibid.
53. Negra, "Quality Postfeminism?"
54. Hughes, "How Tyler Perry Rose from Homelessness to a \$5 Million Mansion."
55. Madea, an abbreviation for the endearment "Mother Dear," is Tyler Perry in drag portraying a feisty, gun-waving grandmother.
56. Hall and Rodriguez, "The Myth of Postfeminism."
57. One might, for example, examine more closely and through an academic lens the performance art of Sarah Jones or the productions and performances of hip hop impresario Missy Elliott.