construction of man."
The Anatomy of Race and Rights, Patricia Williams names racism spirit murder — an injury to an individual's and collectivity's self, spirit, and humanity through the above property, contract, and law upon the objects of property, contract and law. And if we take Hall seriously when he argued in a 1961 essay titled "The personal is political", the critical thing about identity is that it is partly the relationship between you and the Other. The Other is not outside, but also inside the Self. The identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is a fixed point and an unilinear freedom is also the relationship of the editor to oneself. Black people cannot help but "see" the socially constructed pathology that much of the white other "sees," especially if it takes the form of a crisis that brings up other crises and is not captured on television. The visual is problematic because it is face-to-face with our disowned selves in ways that are not available to other media. Many of the essays in this volume indi- rectly argue that the answer to the problem of the political is not to be found through the popular. The spirit-restoring qualities within black life have been mani- fested in the dominant institutions of the black-controlled church and the tradition of music. The problematic of the visual can render a broad understanding of black national politics and incorporates those aspects of black life that have fostered joy over time. The book includes distinct and inter- related essays. First, Griffin, executive director of Third World Newsreel, argues for black control of the production of the moving image. For her, black control amounts to nothing less than those products directed by black artists on subjects and terms that reference the black experience and the black productions in which the artistic vision is controlled by a person of African descent. Thus, according to Griffin, blacks need to own their production and distribution of the moving image. This includes develop- ing ways to nurture and support the work of producers who are struggling to bring their visions to an audience, including film and video artists Camille Billups, Zennabu Keita, Cheryl Dunye, Elyse Kennedy, Duresha Kyri, and Michele Parkerson, to name a few. Arthur Jafa, cinematographer of Julie Dash's Daughters of the Dust, argued that due to material conditions black culture is the stuff of which we carry around in our heads an ontological possessive and dance. The question for masa is how to make black films that have the power to allow the emancipator desires of people of African descent to manifest themselves. Black cinema should attempt to capture distinctively black movements and (national) qualities. It should be able to capture how Aretha sings a song. Jafa is developing an idea called black visual intonation (BVI). BVI consists of "the use of irregular, non-simultaneously predetermined camera notes and frame repulsion to prompt filmic movement in a function that approximates black vocal intonation." And third, as I have previously stated, the creation of a public sphere in which critics can work and provide criticism that is not necessarily interpreted as a threat or a denial of pleasure and which takes the pleasure and concerns of the audience seriously. As Dent observes in her intro- duction, the conference and consequently, the volume endeavors to "understand the complexities of video imaging, the dynamics of representation, and reception the- ories." Black Popular Culture is so wide-ranging and thought provoking that most of my criticisms can be found in the essays them- selves. The first striking was the lack of black producers of popular culture at the confer- ence. The conference and volume could have benefitted from the thoughts of the authors discussed. Lee, Monie Love, Singleton, and Salt-n-Pepa come to mind. This is particularly the case given the kinds of public spaces that many of the contributors want to create and, more important, that the clear impact of the work of Hollywood-produced films and rap have a wide ranging impact on how black people see themselves and on, for example, white suburban youth who want to grow up to be black teenagers. Interestingly enough, none of the papers explicitly addressed black religion. Given its mythical presence in the history of black struggle, the political power that can be mobilized through it in the present, and its slow response to recognize gays and lesbians in their midst as well as the AIDS epidemic, essays on the Church would have been a welcome contribution. Lastly, the volume lacks a sustained theme. The individual essays address a variety of concerns and I take this to be at least part of its significance. It's modern- ers, not revolutionaries, who are making the challenge to "exclusivity of insight." In the case of Black Popular Culture, postmodernism is a process of inquiry and desire that rejects claims to exclusivity or purity in the name of something serious and meaningful that recognizes multiplicity and historical specificity.

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References


Seeing Justice Done

By Dilip V. Vengroff

Race-ing Justice, In-educating Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality, edited with an Introduction by Tom Morrison (Pantheon)

Dilip V. Vengroff is a professor of political theory at the University of California, Irvine. His most recent book is Race-ing Justice, In-educating Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality. Vengroff has also written a number of articles on political theory, African American politics, and democracy. His work focuses on the relationship between justice and power in society, particularly in the context of race and gender.

Clarence Thomas was nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court because he was an ideological conservative, because he was black, and perhaps because he was barely qualified as a "liberal" — a job that the Republican take on the role of affirmative action. There were other potential black candidates who had better credentials and could be consid- ered right-wing doctrinaires. But it was Thomas — a political hack with little to speak of in the way of judicial experience or scholarship who was placed atop of relative obscurity to "inhibit" the seat vacated by Justice Thurgood Marshall, the only black man on the U.S. Supreme Court at that time. Thomas was appointed to the seat by Republican President Ronald Reagan, who was looking for a way to make black people feel that they were part of the political process. The book includes essays that analyze the political and social implications of Thomas's appointment, as well as the broader implications for the future of the Supreme Court.

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relatively homogeneous, identified in a narrative of injustice requiring clear social and political gain at the expense of others. Those successes have been marked, within the liberal ideological ideal of integration, through the symbolic representation of individuals as a cohesive whole. African-Americans have achieved social prominence, this has been understood as an advance for the black community as a whole. In turn, black nationalism and self-help doctrines (of which Thomas was an adherent) have also come to feed off these symbols in attacking the "dependency" of welfare liberalism.

That the interests of an emergent black middle class might diverge from those that it leaves behind — while still laying claim to race solidarity, while capitalizing on the symbolic value of individual achievement — produces a dilemma about what black interests really are.

Of course the distinction between real interests and symbolic representation is itself problematic, and Marable doesn't adequately confront the fact that there isn't an "American experience." But the formless narrative of African-American experience and history to which we return. While sexual representation and oppression are never fully separated from systemic racism, they are not always explicitly linked. The more complex the narrative of the body, the more difficult the task for Thomas, who has always been sensitive to the way his work has been read by others.

Both historian Neil Irwin Painter and English professor Wahlenmara Lubnani, in their critiques of Thomas, have been highly aware of the appropriating notions of black women as pathologi cal, showing how the presentation of Hill as Thomas on how African-American gossip and rumor has long maintained strong patriarchal overtones.

Hill's story is told as a series of events, as if they happened to "just happen," without particular significance. He is portrayed as a man who is always ready to offer advice, to help others. The story doesn't have much depth, but it does provide an escape, and a way for the reader to understand the experiences of others.

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