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## Editor's Introduction to Meridians vo. 17, no. 1

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## Editor's Introduction

Ginetta E. B. Candelario

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## Editor's Introduction

*Meridians* is thrilled to announce that this is our first issue published by Duke University Press. This is also the first issue that I curate fully from submissions accepted during my first year as editor; as such, it expresses my particular vision for *Meridians* going forward. I am keenly interested in internationalizing our transnational frame, specifically by soliciting from scholars, culture workers, and activists living outside the United States and in languages other than English working on our core themes of *feminism*, *race*, and *transnationalism*. This internationalist and global turn is all the more important at this moment, when the most unabashedly violent forms of nationalism, protectionism, insularism, xenophobia, nativism, and fascism have once again become mainstreamed and part of everyday discourse and life not only in the United States but across the world. Protest and resistance have also increased apace, among feminists, antiracists, LGBTQ, environmentalists, labor, and human rights activists, and also across civil society movements and actors. Nonetheless it continues to be Black women who are both the most subject to injustice and the most courageous in the pursuit of justice.

Given that Santo Domingo is the “cradle of blackness in the Americas” (Torres-Saillant 1998, 126) and the birthplace of Black resistance and revolution, we chose the Dominican artist Iris Pérez Romero’s *Corazón iluminado*, *de la serie Energía Vital* (*Illuminated Heart*) as our cover for this issue. This piece from her *Energía Vital/Vital Energy* series is part of Pérez Romero’s broader artistic response to violence against women and girls. At once haunting

and hopeful, the piece beautifully represents this collection of essays, poetry, memoir, *testimonio*, and culture works documenting Black women's resistance and resilience throughout the diaspora. It is this vision and spirit of illuminated, vital resistance that also animates our opening piece, the "Testimonio" by Altagracia Jean Joseph, "*El mejor regalo es ser mujer y sobre todo mujer negra.*" Joseph is a prominent feminist and human rights activist in the Dominican Republic, where several hundred thousand Dominicans of Haitian descent have been informally and formally deported and denationalized through a series of court cases, legislation, and administrative acts. As Joseph explains, this twenty-first-century increase in overt anti-Haitianism has authorized gendered forms of legal and extralegal violence against women and children of Haitian descent and Black women in the Dominican Republic more generally. Written in Spanish and translated by Michelle Joffroy as "The Greatest Gift Is Being a Woman, Above All, a Black Woman," this piece is the first full-length text *Meridians* has published in a language other than English.

Our first research essay is Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant's "The New Howard Woman: Dean Lucy Diggs Slowe and the Education of a Modern Black Femininity." Beauboeuf-Lafontant uncovers the critical role Black women's deans played in institutionalizing co-curricular structures for women's educational achievement at historically Black colleges and universities, structures that became part of the national coeducational landscape. Likewise, in "Panther Teacher: Sarah Webster Fabio's Black Power," Michael J. New reminds us of the critical role Webster Fabio played in the development of Black Studies, as a formative influence upon the students who would develop the critical intellectual and cultural bases of the Black Panthers' political praxis. In particular, her role in the Black Arts Movement and theorization of Black Vernacular English have long been underappreciated; this essay is a step toward correcting that misfortune.

In "Black Hair Haptics: Touch and Transgressing the Black Female Body," Amani Morrison argues that black hair, which "has been both overdetermined and underexplored as a site of intellectual inquiry," triggers "physical and affective registers" that offer unique insights into the nexus between Black women's public and private racialized subjectivity. It is a similar understanding of Black women's hair as a site of gendered racialization and necessary decolonization that inspires the "conscious head-wrapping" movement in Puerto Rico, beautifully documented by María Beatriz Serrano-Abreu in her "Culturework" photo essay

"#TurbanteoConsciente: Racial Healing through Wearable Resistance." As the earring worn by one of the women Serrano photographed openly proclaims, these everyday hairstyling strategies mark these women as *guerreras*, warriors in broader culture wars waged on and through women's bodies.

Moving back in time and across the Caribbean, in her essay "Witchcrafts of Color: Suzanne Césaire, Mayotte Capécia, and the Shapeshifting Dou-dou in Vichy Martinique" Marina Magloire explains how anticolonial West Indian women writers understood that French colonialists were always already hoisted by their own ideological petards. She argues that misogynist colonial fantastical renderings of female shape-shifters and sorceresses unwittingly acknowledged French awareness that Martinican women of color were far less pliant and obliging than they presented themselves to be to the Vichy occupiers of the early twentieth century. Contemporaneously, across the Atlantic, Helen Yitah argues in "Hard-Headed and Masculine-Hearted Women': Female Subjectivity in Mabel Dove-Danquah's Fiction" that literature affords nationalist women writers such as Dove-Danquah a space from which to challenge colonial ideology and also to envision a "new woman" who could resist patriarchal nationalism in Ghana of the 1940s and 1950s. Through this literature, "they announced Ghana's intellectual independence decades before the end of colonial rule."

Linking past, present, and Afro-futurity in the Black diaspora, Jocelyn Fenton Stitt inaugurates our new "State of the Field" feature with "The Aftereffects of Slavery: A Black Feminist Genealogy." More literature review than book review, State of the Field essays are meant to showcase and put texts of various sorts—research monograph, creative nonfiction, memoir, media, and fiction—in conversation with one another, and with the fields and debates they engage. Accordingly, Stitt weaves together an analysis of how Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Tina Campt's *Listening to Images*, and Michelle D. Commander's *Afro-Atlantic Flight: Speculative Returns and the Black Fantastic* take up Saidiya Hartman's groundbreaking consideration of the "aftereffects of slavery." Stitt argues that together these texts—which touch on the diaspora throughout the Americas, from Canada to Brazil, across the Black Atlantic, and in Ghana, Uganda, South Africa, and Senegal—move beyond examining and theorizing "the importance of the enslaved past to contemporary Black subjectivity" to imagining "a place and a time where antiblack racism is no longer a force constraining life outcomes." In so doing, they too are part of a long tradition of

producing the other world that is possible, a currently liberated Afro-future (Nelson 2002).

Likewise, our “Counterpoint” piece, Zoe Spencer and Olivia N. Perlow’s “Sassy Mouths, Unfettered Spirits, and the Neo-Lynching of Korryn Gaines and Sandra Bland: Conceptualizing Post-Traumatic Slave Master Syndrome and the Familiar ‘Policing’ of Black Women’s Resistance in Twenty-First-Century America” and the “Media Matters” piece by Sequoia Maner, “‘Where Do You Go When You Go Quiet?’ The Ethics of Interiority in the Fiction of Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Beyoncé,” together address the consequences of Black women’s speech acts. Spencer and Perlow argue that overt Black resistance to racism and misogyny triggers violent responses from the perpetrators because it articulates rejection of the master class status of whites, and especially of white men. That is, Black resistance to white supremacy and patriarchy traumatizes whites who interpret that resistance as portending white death because white life and white power are co-valent. Consequently in this mental-scape and the social order that produces it, whites believe that Black death is presumptively justifiable rather than the product of a perverse ideology and racist social order. The victimizers recast themselves as the victims in the bankrupt moral universe that is white supremacist patriarchy.

Maner, on the other hand, elaborates on how Black women’s “going quiet” and refusing to reveal their innermost thoughts, feelings, hopes, and dreams also is powerfully threatening to a social order that insists on unlimited access to and knowledge of the minds, bodies, and souls of Black folks. Tracing the kinship ties between Beyoncé’s “Lemonade” and the works of foremothers Hurston and Walker, Maner argues that “retreat into the wild interior [offers a] method for radical personal and social transformation.” Rather than antithetical or diametrically opposed, Black women “sassing” white power and going quiet alike are interdependent and catalyzing speech acts that assert Black women’s whole personhood and historical kinship in the struggle for Black life.

Likewise, this issue’s “Call to Action” is Zoe Spencer’s spoken word piece “Rise Up.” Fittingly, in “Rise Up” Spencer alludes to Beyoncé’s early hit “If I Were a Boy,” in which the singer laments the prerogatives of masculine freedom and the attendant discounting of women’s experiences with her own refrain, “If I were a man.” In this way, Spencer traces the continuum from the suffering in the intimate sphere caused by the

generally tolerated petite misogynist—Beyoncé's "boy"—to the often overlooked misogynist murderous violence of both a "brutal State" and, at times, a community that does not tolerate Black women's self-defense. This, even as Black women are expected to call the state to account if the victim "were a man." In response, Spencer exhorts Black women to rise up and "resist the all too familiar fate" (Bailey 2013, 26). We invite you to look on the redesigned Meridians website for our "In This Issue" feature of Spencer performing this piece.

Likewise, Michelle J. Pinkard's poetry couldn't be a better complement to the texts in this issue. In "Token Survival Guide," five vignettes sketch the code-switching, jazzed up, and jagged landscapes navigated by its protagonist and, by extension, Black women surviving ever present attempts to tokenize the presence of Blackness in the white midst. Moving to a slower yet just as powerfully insistent rhythm, "Summer Girl" also resonates on multiple registers with Black women's embodied, multivalent responses to the material, spiritual, and psychic constraints violently and unremittingly imposed upon them. Despite that, like the season for which she is named, "Summer Girl" is sensual, flourishing, and full of possibility. She hums with life-affirming vibes and savors the sweetness around her.

As we were heading to press, the Brazilian Marielle Franco and her driver, Anderson Gomes, were murdered on March 14, 2018, in Rio de Janeiro, where Franco, a self-described Black, bisexual, feminist *favelada*, was a recently elected City Council member. Her death stunned and inspired outrage throughout the world. As Flávia Santos de Araújo eulogizes in the "Marielle, Presente!" talk that she offered at the Franco memorial event held at Smith College on March 21, 2018, "Marielle was a threat to so many violent, corrupt, and powerful factions" because she was an outspoken human rights advocate for and organizer of Rio's poorest and most vulnerable. Thus this issue closes with an "In Memoriam" for Marielle Franco and is dedicated to all Black women resisters across time and place, from the early twentieth century to today, whose fields of activism range from the college campus to the world of literature, from the tips of the hair on their heads to the valleys of their interior worlds, from Texas to Puerto Rico, Rio, and Ghana. We join Araújo in honoring "you as a whole in your many selves" and in being with you for the struggle yet to come.

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