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## Meridians 12:1

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PAULA J. GIDDINGS

## Editor's Introduction

This volume of *Meridians* is rich with literature and politics. Lucille Clifton, Toni Morrison, Jamaica Kincaid, Martha Southgate, Dionne Brand, and Ralph Ellison are all subjects of critical essays; and there is an intriguing fiction piece by Itoya Udofia. On the political end of the spectrum, there is a meditation on the parallels, differences, and contentions within the conceptual notions of Third World and Transnational feminisms. And finally, this issue features a compelling conversation between the activists Gloria Steinem and Ruchira Gupta on the subject of sex trafficking. The conversation, as well as three additional essays on trafficking, was produced for a conference at Smith College.

Rachel E. Harding, author of "Authority, History, and Everyday Mysticism in the Poetry of Lucille Clifton: A Womanist View," examines the work of the late poet through the framework of Alice Walker's concept of "Womanism," especially as it is informed by Afro-Atlantic religions. Specifically, Harding looks at Clifton's use of the mystical as an "ordinary"—if not casual—part of her worldview that also summons agency, authority, and the power of history.

The essay, "In Her Own Image: Literary and Visual Representations of Girlhood in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*," by Sam Vásquez, is a revisionist text that places these novels—traditionally seen as representative literature by the most critically acclaimed U.S. and

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Caribbean writers respectively—into transnational critical spaces. In so doing, Vásquez is able to look at notions of girlhood across different cultural contexts and highlight the authors' common strategies to inscribe their subjects into the visual and historical record.

Writing oneself into the record is also the preoccupation of the writer Dionne Brand, as noted in Erica L. Johnson's essay, "Building the Neo-Archive: Dionne Brand's *A Map of No Return*." In this piece, Johnson notes the perennial tension of the postcolonial writer who is constantly summoned to set the historiographical record straight in order to prove the humanity of the colonial subject. Brand refers to such subject matter as the "archive," or in moments of frustration when one desires to write about nonpolitical subjects such as the "color of light," for example, that "stupid archive." Nonetheless the archive is attended to—in a way, as Johnson notes, that produces a "Neo-Archive" in the form of a memoir, to satisfy both needs.

Novels are another form of the (Neo) archive, and Ayesha Hardison's "Where Author and Auteur Meet: Genre, the Erotic, and Black Female Subjectivity" offers a critical reading of Martha Southgate's understudied novel, *Third Girl from the Left*. Southgate's protagonists—three generations of black mothers—reclaim the subjectivity of black women in the face of sexualized stereotypes as portrayed in film. Along the way, they reveal the kind of cultural work that transforms us from being consumers of our own misrepresentation to producers who create our own subjectivities.

Since 1998, expurgated chapters of Ralph Ellison's iconic novel, *Invisible Man* (1952) have been available for scholars to peruse. In "There's Something about Mary: Female Wisdom and the Folk Presence in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*," Shanna Greene Benjamin examines the excised chapter, "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar" to glean the literary fate of the character Mary Rambo. Her close reading of the text reveals another dimension in Ellison's use of "folk" and how it illuminates its modern counterpart.

In "Reclaiming Third World Feminism, or, Why Transnational Feminism Needs Third World Feminism," Ranjoo Herr examines the evolution of what she sees as the false dichotomies between the two schools of feminist thought. She argues that the transnationalist perspective that elides or undermines the significance of nationalism and the nation-state is both predominant and flawed and that the Third World feminist view that takes them into account should be reified.

An issue that concerns all feminists is human trafficking, including sex trafficking, which has grown exponentially in concert with the globalization of market forces and services. In April of 2013, Meridians co-sponsored a conference on the subject on the Smith campus. Featured as keynote speakers were two anti-trafficking activists and friends, Ms. co-founder Gloria Steinem and Ruchira Gupta, the founder and president of Apne App, a grassroots organization in India which has had a discernible impact on trafficking locally and globally. The wide-ranging conversation includes anecdotes about their personal experiences and encounters, comparisons of trafficking in different cultural contexts, and policies that impact the issue for better or for worse.

Additionally, three papers regarding trafficking explore narrative, film, and social work. In “Telling Stories of Trafficking: The Politics of Legibility,” Julietta Hua explores how we have come to narrate and thus understand and define trafficking and trafficking victimization in some ways and not others. In this essay, she challenges the conventions of the story-telling that surrounds trafficking and shapes not only popular understandings of the practice and those involved in it, but state and international entities that seek to address it.

Relatedly, “An Intersectional Analysis of Sex Trafficking Films” by Carrie Baker calls for a demystification of the exoticized trafficking scenario in films wherein abducted women are rescued—usually by white men—and often from the hands of men of color.

A third essay, “Human Trafficking and Sex Work: Foundational Social Work Principles” is written by Crystal DeBoise, who heads the Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center. She is a social worker who has long worked with human trafficking survivors and provides a primer about the methods, principles, and ways of outreach that have been the most effective in engaging with them.